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THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

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CLOSE ENCOUNTERS
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STRANGE DAYS

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

NOT OF THIS EARTH?

In this issue, we revisit an almost forgotten case of high strangeness from the 1970s – the mystery of the ‘Risley Silver Man’, in which an alien invasion appeared to be targeting a highly sensitive British nuclear research site. Late one night in March 1978, a service engineer called Ken Edwards was driving home from a union meeting. His route took him past what was then the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) site at Risley; and it was here that he saw a 7ft-tall silver man cross the road, shoot light beams from his eyes, and pass through a chain-link security fence. Over the years, various increasingly outlandish theories have been mooted to explain what must count as one of the oddest UK close encounters on record (our favourite is that the Silver Man was the ghost of a dead extraterrestrial), but the case has largely gathered dust.

Step forward Glenn Vaudrey, who through a combination of being in the right place at the right time, some persistent detective work and a bit of good luck, thinks he has finally found the truth behind the Silver Man story; his solution has very little to do with aliens – turn to p36 – but it may have put the mystery to rest at last.

Speaking of aliens, the *New York Times* (23 July) has once again been pushing the story of the Pentagon’s secret ‘UFO’ programme, supposedly a continuation of the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program that the *Times* claimed in 2017 had been in operation until 2012, when the Defense Department axed its \$22 million budget (see FT362:2, 363:28 and passim for more).

Once again, the Gray Lady appeared to be making breathless claims of recovered alien artefacts that, if true, would have caused some excitement in ufological circles.

Sadly, the paper published a small correction to the story the following day: “An earlier version of this article inaccurately rendered remarks attributed to Harry Reid, the retired Senate majority leader from Nevada. Mr Reid said he believed that crashes of objects of unknown origin may have occurred and that retrieved materials should be studied; he did not say that crashes had occurred and that retrieved materials had been studied secretly for decades.” Oh well.

GETTING COPIES OF FT

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ERRATA

FT392:16: Mark Dormann of Palm Coast, Florida, was confused by the story of the puppy found in Siberian permafrost: “I can see how radiocarbon dating can determine when it was frozen (18,000 years ago) but not how old it was (two months).” This was down to careless wording in the original report, which went uncorrected. The puppy’s age was determined by dentition, not radiocarbon dating.

FT393:16: Simon Lamont emailed with a correction to our report on Eamon Holmes’s comments on 5G and coronavirus; for the record, the TV presenter’s controversial remarks were made on ITV’s *This Morning*, not the BBC’s *The One Show*.

FT396:63: Incorrect details were printed for the two films covered in this issue’s The Reverend’s Review column. They should have been as follows:

Death Ship, Dir Alvin Rakoff, US 1980. Nucleus Films, £14.99 (Blu-ray).

The Woman in Black, Dir Herbert Wise, UK 1989, Network, (Ltd Edition Blu-ray). This is now sold out, but Network have announced that a standard edition will be released in the future.

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

FRENCH HORSE RIPPINGS

A new spate of “barbaric” horse mutilations has spread across France



CHARLY TRIBALLEAU / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A horse stands in a field in Mortree, Normandy. The attacks have been taking place across rural France.

A series of grisly horse killings and mutilations has shocked rural France, with police struggling to find either the culprits or a motive.

So far this year, at least 15 horses, mares, ponies, mules and donkeys have been found dead in various areas of France, with parts of their bodies mutilated; another five were found wounded but alive. Some had their throats slashed, others had been stabbed in the heart or knocked out with bricks. Eyes, muzzles, and sometimes genitalia had been cleanly severed. In almost every case the right ear had been carefully removed.

The latest attack took place in Deux-Sèvres, where a mare was discovered on 24 August in a field near Mauléon, dead and mutilated, with her right ear cut

off. Other recent attacks were reported from Sainte-Colombe-sur-Gand, in the north of the Loire, and from St Etienne, near Lyon. Here, the body of a mare who had died from natural causes had been left in a field awaiting removal on a Friday; an inspection the following Monday showed that the ear, eye and nose had been cut off.

Before this, a one-year-old filly was found with her right ear and genitalia cut off, an eye gouged out, and her neck slashed. A woman walking in a meadow near the Burgundy village of Cortambert discovered the crime. “Everything leads us to conclude that the horse was tortured,” said police officer Jessica Martin. “It’s utterly barbaric.”

Last summer, a horse was

found dead with its ear missing near the village of Châtel-Guyon, in central France, and mutilations of a similar kind were also observed in Belgium and Germany. A spate of cases was reported in France between 2014 and 2016, but this year’s high numbers are unprecedented.

Speculation as to motive has led some to posit a Satanic cult, witchcraft, insurance fraud, trophy hunting or an Internet challenge. The horses were not killed for food, as no flesh was taken from the bodies. One had been electrocuted with a portable generator; others appear to have been stunned or killed by a blow from a large stone before being mutilated.

The first incident this year occurred in February, when the corpse of four-year-old

Gold des Luthiers was found in his paddock at a Moselle agricultural college, near the German border. Three days later, the body of Démon du Médoc was discovered by a racehorse trainer’s son, with an ear removed but no other mutilations. “I think they made him gallop and he died of heart failure and then they cut off his ear,” said the trainer. In April, a two-year-old filly, Sainte Riquet, was found dead by the daughter of another horse trainer. “At first we thought it was a natural death,” she said. “Then we discovered traces of wounds, and one of her ears was missing.” Two other horses had been injured. One had a head wound, the other had a haunch injury.

Démon du Médoc’s owner told of different theories she had heard. “One is that these are ritual killings by a sect,” she said. “But which sect, and what’s the significance of cutting off the ear?” A bull’s ear is sometimes cut off and presented to the matador as a trophy in bullfights. Some bullfighting takes place in France, but only in the south. *D.Telegraph*, 11 Aug; *vice.com*, 19 Aug; *lemonde.fr*, 18 Aug; *independent.co.uk*, 20 Aug; *www.rtl.fr*, 24 Aug 2020.

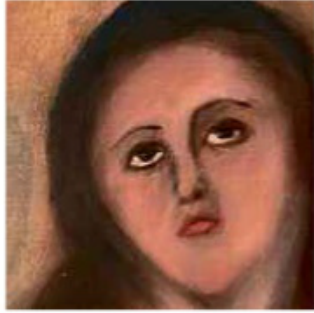
For earlier coverage of horse ripping, see **FT64:18** (Sweden, 1991-92); **FT66:12** (Hampshire, 1983); “Horsewatch: Madness in the Home Counties” by Paul Sieveking, **FT68:46-47** (1993); and “They rip horses, don’t they?” By Robert Irving and Paul Sieveking, **FT94:22-28**, which continues the chronology of cases to 1996; **101:16** (East Sussex ‘copycat’ cases, 1997); **132:8** (northern Germany, 1999); **171:32** (across the UK, 2001); **175:4-5** (Peak District, 2002); **286:22** (South Wales and Cornwall, 2012).



GHOSTS ON THE GREEN

Haunting tales from the world of sport

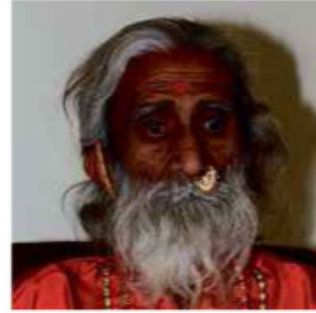
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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Spain's latest disastrous art 'restoration'

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RELIGION ROUND-UP

Death of an Indian male yogi 'goddess'

PAGE 24

KNITTING WEBSITE MAKES PEOPLE ILL

Did a site redesign cause a range of symptoms, or was suggestion at work?

In mid-June, popular knitting and crochet site Ravelry.com altered the design of its webpages. The Boston-based site was founded in 2007; by March 2020 it had a reported nine million registered users. Soon after the redesign, some site visitors began reporting various ailments, including migraines and seizures. As news of these health problems spread among users, it was alleged that even viewing a screenshot could make people unwell. Some visitors claimed they had fallen ill as soon as looking at the site; others argued for a delayed action effect, with illnesses coming hours or days afterwards.

Dr Robert Bartholomew, a specialist in mass psychogenic illnesses (see FT253:30-37; FT316:36-40; FT359:22 and passim; FT372:22-23) regards this as a classic case. He noted that soon after the new website design went live, a user posted this message on Instagram: "Warning: Ravelry may potentially trigger seizures for people with photosensitive epilepsy as well as migraines. Viewer discretion is advised." Less than a week after this post, at least seven people had reported seizures which, they claimed, had followed visits to the website.

As the alarm spread via social media platforms, other Ravelry users began reporting an array of health problems; in addition to seizures and headaches, dizziness, nausea, visual disturbances, eye pain, vertigo and vomiting were all claimed to have resulted from viewing the site. Others reported fatigue, difficulty concentrating, confusion, anxiety, depression, numbness and muscle spasms. "Within minutes of seeing the new design," one woman wrote, "I had searing pain in my eyes and head, and trouble focusing my vision. It lasted hours." Another woman, with

a history of migraines, described how "the room started rolling and it was like I was on a boat with all the queasiness and motion sickness." This continued for 10 minutes after she had logged off the site. "I wouldn't have associated the weird facial and neck pain I get from looking at [the site] ... without other people speaking up," said another site user.

The panic's rapid spread via social media led to an exponential increase in the number of people reporting illnesses. One influencer warned of "seizures, dizziness, nausea, and migraine in a pretty significant amount of people" who had viewed the redesigned site, cautioning their followers to "be aware". Another described Ravelry.com as "a harmful and potentially dangerous website." Fear of accessing the site was such that the company's 'contact us' email address was circulated on Instagram (on which hyperlinks are inoperative) so users would not have to risk visiting the website itself in order to contact the company with their complaints.

Photosensitive epilepsy (PSE) is characterised by seizures caused by a variety of visual stimuli that may include flashing lights and sharply contrasting geometric patterns. It is a less common form of epilepsy: whereas approximately one in every 100 people are diagnosed with epilepsy, PSE occurs at a rate of about one in 4,000, although the incidence rate in any given year is even less, an estimated 1.1

per 100,000. The most common trigger is flashing lights, at a rate ranging between 5 to 30 per second.

Bartholomew observed that while PSE is rare, with a group as large as the Ravelry community, one would expect some of these people to be experiencing a variety of health complaints on any given day. Other than the self-reported symptoms, there is no further evidence to support the theory that the website itself is making people sick. Thus, the most likely explanation for these claims of illness is mass suggestion and the redefinition of various ailments as Ravelry-connected.

As we have seen recently with the 5G panic, new technologies are often blamed for health problems: cars, trains, telephones, wifi and mobile phones have all been vilified for causing illness. Belief and expectation are powerful; double-blind studies have shown that subjects who report symptoms after exposure to electromagnetic fields are unable to detect the presence of those fields, while false exposure to electromagnetic fields results in symptoms as often as does real exposure (Rubin et al., 2005, 2006). Studies assessing expectations prior to exposure (whether to real or fake fields) suggest that beliefs play a key role in determining whether symptoms develop or not. If people expect symptoms, they are more likely to experience them. *Psychology Today*, 30 June; *psychologytoday.com*, 6 July 2020.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

MURPHY VOWS FIGHT AGAINST SNOWSTORMS

Newark (NJ) Star-Ledger, 19 Nov 2018.

Ghost slugs 'invading' Britain

D.Mirror, 19 Dec 2019.

PHONES AND CONSOLES CAUSING 'HORNS' TO GROW ON SKULLS OF THE YOUNG

D.Telegraph, 21 June 2019.

UFO calls for negotiations with Lufthansa

Aachener Zeitung, 27 Sept 2019.

DONCASTER BABY OWL WEBCAM 'BANNED BY FACEBOOK OVER SEX AND NUDITY RULE'

BBC News, 7 July 2020

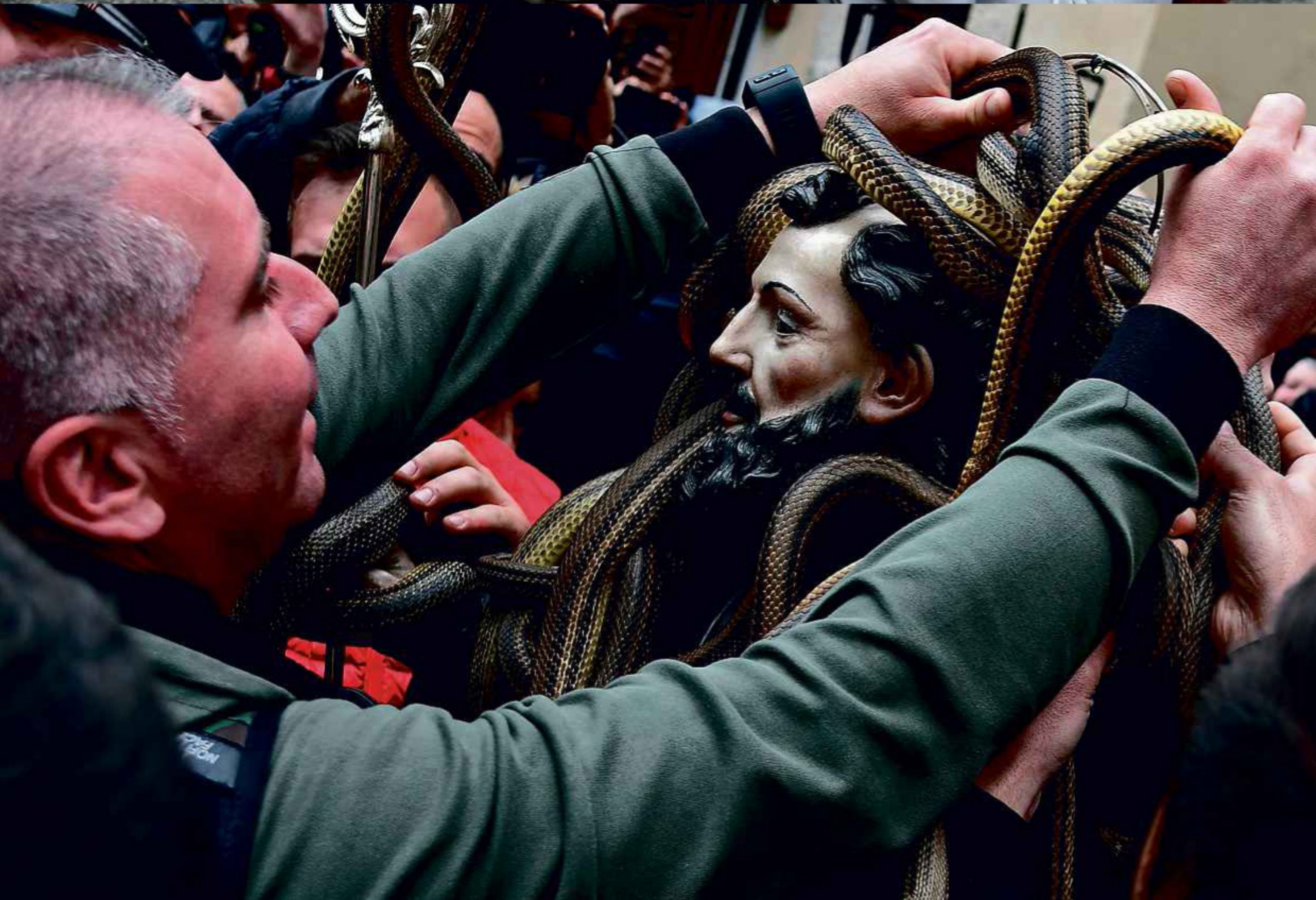
THE SAINT AND THE SNAKES



Although this year's snake festival in Kefalos, Greece, went ahead as planned (see p.26) – albeit with celebrants wearing masks and following safety guidelines – another religious festival with a serpentine theme had to be cancelled due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation. Normally, on 1 May, the people of Cocullo, a small village

in the Abruzzo region of Italy, adorn a statue of Saint Domenico with live snakes before parading it through the village streets for the Festa dei Serpari. The snakes – all non-venomous – are brought by local snake charmers, called 'serpari', who exhibit them in the village square and set them free once more in the woods

when the festival is over. St Domenico di Sora (951-1031) was a Benedictine monk renowned for his ability to cure those bitten by snakes. Some of his relics, including a tooth said to heal snakebite, are on display in the local church. These photographs show the 2019 festival. Photos: FILIPPO MONTEFORTE/AFP via Getty Images



SIDELINES...

CUPBOARD LOCK-IN

A Sheffield pub lost its licence after police found drinkers hiding in cupboards during the coronavirus lockdown. The Pitsmoor Hotel in Sheffield was raided by police on 24 April after reports it was still serving customers, and issued with a prohibition order. But when they returned the next day, officers found people in cupboards and on the roof “to make it look like no one was inside”. *BBC News, 24 June 2020.*

EMUS BARRED

Kevin and Carol, a pair of friendly emus who wander around Yaraka in Queensland, Australia, have been barred from the town’s only pub after leaving droppings on the floor and stealing toast. *theguardian.com, 28 July 2020.*

DOG SHOTS DRIVER

An Oklahoma woman, Tina Springer, 44, was a car passenger when she was shot in the thigh by a Labrador retriever travelling in the same vehicle. The sharpshooting dog had jumped onto a backseat console, underneath which was a .22 handgun. *Adelaide S.Mail, 6 Oct 2019.*

EXOTIC SUPERFAN

Although the English football season has recommenced, games are being played in empty stadia because of coronavirus precautions. In the absence of real crowds, promotion-chasing Championship club Leeds United are allowing their supporters to place cardboard cut-outs of themselves in their usual seats. A cardboard Joe Exotic (the currently-jailed ‘Tiger King’) was spotted in the crowd on 27 May as Leeds played Fulham. The week before, a cut-out Osama bin Laden was present, for which club officials have apologised. *sportbible.com, 27 June 2020.*



MARTIN ROSS

COVID CORNER

Collecting lockdown dreams, plus more questions about the deadly virus’s origin



ABOVE LEFT: Susan Wardell has been mapping Covid-19 dreams in an online project. ABOVE RIGHT: Charlotte Beradt recorded the dreams of friends living in Nazi Germany. BELOW: The results were published in her 1966 book *The Third Reich of Dreams*.

CORONA-DREAMING

Many people have reported experiencing unusual or more vivid dreams during the Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns. One explanation for the increased vividness of some people’s dreams is that being confined at home deprives the brain of external stimuli. And as compensation, the brain generates additional ‘sense data’ in dreams. Another explanation is that working people usually spend their lives in a state of mild sleep deprivation (waking up early for the commute to work). Now that many people are on furlough or working from home, they’ve switched off their alarm clocks and are consequently enjoying a full night’s sleep each night; which, it’s been suggested, means increased REM sleep and therefore more intense dreams.

Susan Wardell, a social anthropologist at New Zealand’s University of Otago, has established an online project designed to record and map people’s Covid-19 dreams, described as “an experimental, collective dream journal”, and inspired by previous dream research, such as Ernest Hartmann’s post-9/11 dream analysis. Examining the dreams of 33 women and 11 men outside Manhattan, none of whom had lost friends or relatives in the terrorist attacks, Hartmann found a greater intensity of imagery, which is “very

Wardell cites “The Third Reich of Dreams” as inspirational



consistent with findings in people who have experienced trauma of various kinds,” he wrote. “The idea is that that we all experienced at least some trauma on 9/11”.

Wardell also cites Charlotte Beradt’s ‘Third Reich of Dreams’ project as inspirational. Beradt was a German-Jewish journalist who, barred from publishing after Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, began secretly recording the dreams of her fellow citizens which she posted

to friends overseas. By 1939 she had collated over 300 dreams. At the very start of Hitler’s dictatorship in 1933, before people knew what to expect, one woman dreamed of seeing her neighbourhood stripped of its usual signs, which were replaced with posters listing 20 forbidden words; the first was “Lord” and the last was “I”.

Beradt saw the value of these dreams as revealing the effects of authoritarian regimes upon the collective unconscious. Again in 1933, a woman dreamed of a mind-reading machine, “a maze of wires” able to detect her associating Hitler with the word “Devil”. Beradt found several dreams about thought control, which, she suggested, anticipated the bureaucratic absurdities employed by the Nazis to terrorise their own citizens. In one dream, a 22-year-old woman believed her curved nose identified her as Jewish, and attended a ‘Bureau of Verification of Aryan Descent’, which, while fictional, was close to the Nazis’ Ahnenerbe agency, established two years later. In 1935, a Jewish lawyer dreamed of travelling through the ice and snow of Lapland to reach “the last country on Earth where Jews are still tolerated”, but a hostile customs official threw the man’s passport onto the ice. In his dream, he could see ahead of him the shimmering, unreachable promised land. Six years later, the mass



deportations “to the East” began. And long before the death camps were established in occupied Poland, a woman dreamed in 1936 of a snowy road strewn with watches and jewelry.

Beradt’s research was published in 1966 as *Das Dritte Reich des Traums* (an English-language translation, *The Third Reich of Dreams*, appeared two years later). An afterword by Bruno Bettelheim highlighted the book’s many prophetic dreams, where, as early as 1933, “the dreamer can recognise deep down, what the system is really like.”

Wardell’s coronavirus dreams project identified anxiety as a common theme – not necessarily anxiety about dying or becoming very ill, but more mundane human concerns “about being in proximity to other people or being distant and separate and not able to reach people you love.”

One dreamer saw the human equivalent of Covid-19 attempting to break into the their office, and dreamed of being stuck in a crowded building with no social distancing. Another person had a near-nightmarish dream about being told they would have to isolate underground: “I was in a bar and then I remembered about the pandemic and that I should leave. I couldn’t find the door, and I kept going through different doors and getting more lost... I eventually came to an underground hospital, and they wouldn’t let me leave because I’d now been in contact with sick people. I realised I would have

to isolate underground. It was very claustrophobic.”

Another recalls standing on a staircase with “an institutional feel – a hospital or prison perhaps – I think I am a patient or inmate – I am talking to another patient/inmate.” Someone comes up to his left side and injects the back of his upper left arm. The dreamer turns to look, and sees “a light framed and slightly oriental looking man with a short wispy black goatee... using a small syringe to inject me. ‘OK, all done.’ I realise this is not the first time this has happened and so I say to the man... ‘Excuse me, what is that for? I don’t remember consenting to or asking for it.’

The man responds with an attitude of ‘I’m just doing my job mate,’ and says ‘it’s because of CFD, I give you one of these every day and it means you don’t get it!’” The dreamer understands CFD to mean coronavirus, perhaps a conflation of ‘Covid’ and ‘CJD’ (Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease). He is disconcerted to see that the medic “does not give an immunisation injection to the person I am talking to.”

Wardell’s CoviDreams project is still active. Contributors may record their dreams anonymously via an online survey here: <https://tinyurl.com/y2ms8k4s>. The resulting dreams are then logged on a world map which may be accessed at: <https://tinyurl.com/y52fqws4>. *museumofdreams.org/third-reich-of-dreams*; *reuters.com*, 19 Feb 2008; *metronews.co.nz*, 30 Apr 2020; *newyorker.com*, 7 Nov 2019.

ESCAPE FROM WUHAN

A pre-print research article suggests the DNA of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes the Covid-19 illness), contained HIV code. In April 2020, French biologist and Nobel laureate Luc Montagnier claimed the virus was a botched, man-made attempt to create an AIDS vaccine. However, British geneticists say it is currently impossible to genetically edit a virus so that it resembles SARS-CoV-2.

Man-made or not, the theory that the deadly virus escaped from a lab is not as outlandish as it may at first appear. Analysis of mobile phone data indicated there may have been an emergency shutdown at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (pictured below) between 7 and 24 October (FT395:6). And in 2004, the SARS virus escaped from a high-containment research lab in Beijing on at least three occasions, leading to local outbreaks of the disease.

Most surprisingly, it may yet turn out that Covid-19 did not start in China. In June, Spanish virologists revealed they had discovered traces of the virus in samples of waste water collected in March 2019 – nine months before the disease was seen in China. Furthermore, Italian scientists have now apparently found evidence of the virus in sewage samples taken from Milan and Turin in mid-December 2019, several weeks before the first Italian case was detected, and traces were found in Brazil as early as November. *D.Telegraph*, 30 July 2020.



SIDELINES...

ACCIDENTAL INVASION

Poland accidentally invaded the Czech Republic in late May, briefly annexing a corner of its neighbour’s territory, when Polish soldiers mistakenly crossed into the Czech Republic while guarding parts of the border amid coronavirus lockdowns. They then began turning away Czech citizens from a church they were trying to visit in their own country. The Czech foreign ministry said Poland had “unofficially assured us that this incident was merely a misunderstanding with no hostile intention.” *independent.co.uk*, 13 June 2020.

WE’LL BE BACK

Two inmates who escaped from Rome’s Rebibbia prison left guards a polite note saying they had personal business to deal with, but promised to return in about 15 days once everything was sorted out. Cousins Davad Zukanovic, 40, and Lil Ahmetovic, 46, broke out on 2 June by scaling a wall using a water hose, explaining they needed “to protect their children from a nasty business they had got themselves into,” and that only they could fix matters since both their wives were also in jail. *yahoo.com*, 9 June 2020.

LAPTOP VERSUS BEAR

A Southern California woman enjoying an outdoor nap in her backyard was attacked by a bear, but managed to fight it off using her laptop. The 19-year-old woman had fallen asleep in a chair when the animal attacked, scratching her arms and legs. After it began biting her leg, she struck back with the only weapon close to hand, her laptop, stunning the bear while she escaped inside her Sierra Madre home. *edition.cnn.com*, 18 June 2020.

CROW CONTROL

Essex police officers and staff are being “terrorised” by a family of crows nesting at its HQ. Deputy Chief Constable Pippa Mills warned visitors to the site to “beware” and “keep calm and keep walking” in a tweet about the issue. A warning sign advises people to “take an alternative route” or “wear a hat or use an umbrella”, urging people to “not act aggressive” as the crows will “feel threatened”. *BBC News*, 5 June 2020.



SIDELINES...

UNLIKELY CLAIM

Authorities in Texas were called to a family's home after they received an unexpected package containing 32 bags of marijuana. Harris County Sheriff's Office deputies were called to a Houston home after the residents reported receiving a package they hadn't ordered. "If it is yours please contact the Harris County Sheriff's Office to claim it," the sheriff wrote in an Instagram post. Possession of marijuana is illegal in Texas. *upi.com*, 16 June 2020.

LEGAL BEAVERS

Fifteen families of beavers living on East Devon's River Otter have been given permanent 'right to remain' by the UK government, following Devon Wildlife Trust's five-year study of beavers' impact on the local environment. Their dams function as flood defences and improve water quality. The industrious rodents may have been illegally reintroduced to the area by wildlife activists known as 'beaver bombers'. The University of Exeter's Prof Richard Brazier said: "The benefits of beavers far outweigh any costs associated with their management." *BBC News*, 6 Aug 2020.

PUBIC BEER

Hell's Basement, a brewery based in Alberta, Canada, was forced to apologise after unwittingly naming a beer after the Māori word for pubic hair. The brewery chose the name HuruHuru thinking that it meant 'feather' or 'fur.' But Te Hamua Nikora, a well-known Māori TV personality in New Zealand, said: "Yes I know huruhuru means feather, fur and even hair of the head... But it is most commonly used as hair from a person's privates." *BBC News*; *metro.co.uk*, 8 Aug 2020.



MARTIN ROSS

CHILD CATCHERS

Bogus social workers reported in Hull and kidnapping panics spread in India

BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS

A Hull mum has warned other parents to be on the alert for two men claiming to be from social services who attempted to gain entrance to her home in order to take away her child. The mother of one, living in the Wold Road area of west Hull, said the men had knocked on her door on Tuesday 5 May at around 4.30pm, telling her they needed to come inside to "remove her child from my care until further notice." One was wearing a suit. She described them as at first "convincing", but said they began to get "shifty" when asked for ID and documents proving that the removal of her child had been officially authorised. One of the men flashed an ID card, but so quickly she was unable to examine it. They also refused to give their names because of "confidentiality". She says they were very forceful and tried to push their way into the house. When she refused, they "then walked off saying they would be back with the police."

They seemingly knew she had one child, but were unable to tell her whether it was a son or a daughter. "I have no idea how they knew I had a child," the mother said. "They could have followed me, it could be from the rainbow paintings in my window, could be anything."

She called Humberside Police, who took a statement and are investigating. They are seeking two men in their early to mid 40s, one slightly balding and going grey, the other a redhead, both with largish builds. One was wearing a black suit, and the other blue jeans and a white shirt.

Fortunately, the mother added, both she and her daughter are fine after the ordeal. "She is none the wiser to this as she was playing and didn't see the men."

There have been so many similar reports over the last 10 years or more that such incidents in themselves generate even more questions. Have these bogus social workers (or sometimes bogus police: see FT335:22) ever been successful in kidnapping a child, and if so, was the child ever found again? Who are these fake

officials and who do they work for? Or are they freelancers? Are there a number of them, or do these various reports describe the same individuals? Sometimes the bogus callers are male, sometimes female; sometimes in pairs, sometimes alone. What is their motive? Are they paedophiles, or an updated version of 'white slave traffickers'? Or is something stranger going on? Are they somehow connected to the Men in Black (MIB), the sinister visitors who call upon witnesses of UFOs, trying to intimidate them into retracting their statements? *hulldailymail.co.uk*, 7 May 2020. For more bogus social workers, see FT270:10-11, 273:11, 281:11, 315:24, 335:22, 341:23, 366:8.

INDIAN PANICS



Three men were killed in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, possibly having been mistaken for child kidnappers or organ harvesters. The victims, two Hindu sadhus and their driver, were en route to a funeral in Palghar district when a 500-strong mob in Gadchinchle village dragged them from their car, allegedly beating them to death with sticks and rods after first stoning the vehicle. A video showing the killings of driver Nilesh Telgade, 30, and of his godmen passengers Mahant Kalpavrikshgiri, 70, and Sushilgiri Maharaj, 35, was circulated on social media.

Two days before the lynching, police had rescued two doctors and their driver from a mob of 200-250 people at Sarni Patilpada village, 60 km (37 miles) away. The occupants of the car and the police managed to escape serious injury after being pelted with stones. Several other incidents of vehicles being attacked have been recorded in the same region, home to some of India's sched-

uled tribes.

Two years before, WhatsApp rumours of child abductors and organ thieves led to the deaths of around 40 people in various areas of India. In the nearby Dhule district, five men belonging to the Nath Gosavi nomadic tribal community were beaten to death with steel rods, sticks, stones and bricks in July 2018. They had been suspected of kidney theft after talking to a six-year-old girl. Another incident in June 2018 saw two men killed when they stopped at a village in Assam state asking for directions to a nearby waterfall where they hoped to find ornamental fish.

It is thought by some that India's coronavirus lockdown, which began on 25 March, has contributed to the violence. With so few vehicles on the roads, those that are seen arouse suspicion, even if on legitimate business, like sadhus trying to reach a funeral or doctors attending to patients. "The initial days of the lockdown went by peacefully," said local politician Vinod Nikole. "But since the past two weeks, we have been noticing rumours about thieves and kidnappers being circulated through WhatsApp. At every food distribution drive, we have been trying to persuade villagers not to believe them and assuring them that they have nothing to be afraid of."

Rumours had been rife in local villages, Nikole said. "Villagers have not been sleeping at night fearing that outsiders will rob their homes or kidnap their children to harvest their kidneys. There have been no such instances but residents of many villages are so scared that they have been patrolling their villages every night to spot suspicious passers-by." He also accused police of negligence. "Had the police made their presence known in these villages at night, villagers would have been convinced that they had nothing to fear," he claimed. For previous Indian child-snatching panics, see FT358:6-7, 371:20-21. *BBC News*, 2 July 2018; 20 Apr 2020; *newindian-express.com*, 19 Apr; *indianexpress.com*, 21 Apr 2020.



ANTISOCIAL MEDIA

'Goose' porn, livestream murder and death sentence by Zoom...

DEATH BY ZOOM I

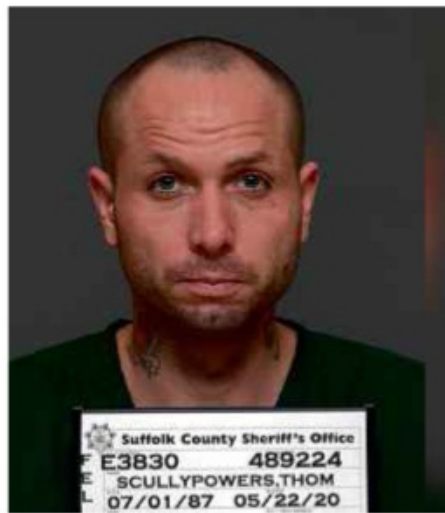
A father was killed by his son during a Zoom video chat with 20 other participants on 21 May. Dwight Powers, 72, was stabbed to death and nearly decapitated by his son, Thomas Scully-Powers, 32, who then jumped out of a window and fled their home in Amityville, Long Island. He was found within an hour and charged with second-degree-murder after chat guests, having seen Mr Powers fall down, had alerted police. The Zoom chat had been an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, and Thomas Scully-Powers was apparently visible in it at one point; a participant described having seen bed sheets ripped off the bed by a "gentleman who appeared to be naked as well as bald," who then placed the bed sheets on the floor, "as if he was covering something up." *newser.com, BBC News, New York Post, Sun, 22 May 2020.*

DEATH BY ZOOM II

In May, a man was given a death sentence by a Singapore court in a Zoom video call. Punithan Genasan, 37, was told he was to be hanged for his role in a 2011 drug deal. It's the first time Singapore has passed a death sentence remotely.

The majority of Singapore's court hearings had been adjourned until at least 1 June, when the city's current lockdown period was due to end, but a handful of cases deemed essential were being dealt with remotely. Drug trafficking was one of four crimes that, until recently, led to mandatory capital punishment upon conviction. Judges can now use their discretion and, under certain conditions, are able to reduce the death sentence to life imprisonment with caning.

Human rights groups have protested the use of remote sentencing for capital crimes. Kirsten Han, a Singapore journalist and activist, said: "The delivering of a death sentence via Zoom just highlights how clinical and administrative capital punishment is," adding that the lack of a courtroom appearance meant that Genasan's family were



ABOVE: Thomas Scully-Powers was arrested and charged with the murder of his father, Dwight Powers, during an Alcoholics Anonymous Zoom meeting.

unable to speak and hold hands with him. Amnesty International said: "At a time when global attention is focused on saving and protecting lives in a pandemic, the pursuit of the death penalty is all the more abhorrent."

Earlier in May, a Lagos court sentenced a Nigerian driver, Olalekan Hameed, to death by hanging for the murder of his employer's mother, 76-year-old Jolasun Okunsanya, in December 2018. The hearing lasted almost three hours and was attended virtually by lawyers, including Nigeria's attorney general. *BBC News, 20 May 2020.*

HONKING OR BONKING?

An electrician sacked for playing a "noisy" porn video on his phone during a meeting with more than 100 council workers unsuccessfully sued his employer for unfair dismissal, claiming the sound was actually that of a honking goose.

David West, an electrician for Redditch Borough Council,



Worcester, accidentally opened a WhatsApp message containing a video of a woman having loud sex "at full pelt". During the council meeting at Redditch Town Hall, he was observed "frantically" tapping on his mobile in an attempt to stop the video. The staff briefing was interrupted by the loud noises of "three to four sexual moans" lasting up to 30 seconds. An employment tribunal heard how some staff broke into laughter while others were stunned by what they had heard.

The tribunal was told how Mr West had "concocted a rather implausible story", arguing that the noises had been those of a honking goose in a video sent to him by a friend. However, none of the staff members questioned said the noise resembled that of a goose.

Although the tribunal accepted the video had been played accidentally, it affirmed the council's position that "the sounds were of a sexual nature and were the sounds of a female in the act of sexual intercourse having an orgasm". In his panicked attempts to shut down the video, Mr West claimed to have deleted the entire message from his phone. Dismissing his claims and rejecting his version of events, the tribunal ruled that "on the balance of probabilities" the sounds were of a sexual nature and not of a goose, and that Mr West was the only person who believed that a bird had made the noise. *D.Mail, 1 Aug 2020.*

SIDELINES...

RUSSIAN DOUBT

Almost half of all Russians (49 per cent) believe the 1969 Moon landing was a US government hoax, according to a nationwide opinion poll conducted by the Russia Public Opinion Research Center, but this figure is down eight per cent from 2018. Younger Russians were more inclined to view the lunar landing as genuine, with 57 per cent of respondents aged between 18 and 24 believing it actually took place. *tass.com, 29 Aug 2020.*

TONSIL SURPRISE

A 25-year-old Japanese woman who complained of a twitchy tonsil, got a shock when a doctor found a live 1.5in (3.8cm) worm buried in it. A study in *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* said the woman had eaten sashimi five days earlier. *D.Telegraph, 15 July 2020.*

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

A Scottish library book has been returned 37 years late to an English library 750 miles (1,200km) away. The book, Peter Bull's *To Sea in a Sieve*, was borrowed from Shetland Library and was due back in July 1983, but was handed in to Bungay Community Library in Suffolk earlier this year by a "regular customer" whose late husband had borrowed the book. *BBC News, 8 Aug 2020.*

SCREAM THERAPY

People stressed by lockdown can let off steam by having their screams played through a loud-speaker in remote parts of Iceland. Visit Iceland has set up a website for people to record themselves, with the results played from one of seven speakers in locations including the peak of the Festarfall volcano and at Skogafoss waterfall in the south of the country. *D.Telegraph, 5 Mar 2020.*





STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

FIREBALLS

A South Korean YouTuber set his private parts alight as punishment for not winning the multiplayer party game 'Fall Guys'. Shin Tae Il, also known as the infamous "angry Korean gamer", set his crotch area on fire following suggestions from viewers. Livestream watchers saw the gamer strip down to his shorts and pour lighter fluid over his genitals. He later informed his fans he had been treated in hospital for second-degree burns. *technology.inquirer.net*, 8 Aug 2020.

VERY TAXING

A tax fraud investigator who claimed he had been the victim of religious discrimination told HMRC bosses that Satan had appeared on his computer and had to be banished with holy water. Devout Christian Paul O'Connor lost his job in Risk and Intelligence Services after urging one manager to travel to Medjugorje to be baptised as a cure for chronic pain, and suggesting another colleague be "exorcised" as he was "full of evil". Mr O'Connor was paid 12 weeks' salary and awarded £25,600 compensation, but still tried to sue for unfair dismissal. *thescottishsun.co.uk*, 13 July 2020.

ISLAND OF MR MORANDI

For over 30 years, Mauro Morandi has been the sole inhabitant of the isle of Budelli off the Sardinian coast, arriving there by accident 31 years ago while attempting to sail from Italy to Polynesia. Now Italy's Robinson Crusoe faces eviction as local authorities intend to transform his ramshackle hut into an environmental observatory – but the 81-year-old former teacher says he has no intention of leaving. *cnn.com*, 28 July 2020.

BREAD QUEST

A man who drove 124 miles (200km) from Nottingham to London was stopped by police after they clocked him doing 110mph (170km/ph) on his return home. Asked why he had made the long journey during lockdown, the driver, who had his two young children in the car, told police he had travelled to London to buy bread "because it was £1 cheaper". He was given a £60 fixed penalty notice and will be fined at least £100 for the speeding offence. *Metro*, 8 Apr 2020.

WILD CRIMINALS |

Berliners fall prey to an opportunistic boar and a shoe-fetishist urban fox



ABOVE AND BELOW: An unfortunate Berlin nudist sets off in hot pursuit of the boar which had grabbed his laptop. **BOTTOM:** Berlin's vulpine shoe-thief caught on camera, and the hoard of over 100 items of purloined footwear collected by the bold fox.

A Berlin nudist gave chase to a wild boar after it grabbed a bag containing his laptop. The naked man pursued the boar and her two piglets, much to the amusement of fellow sunbathers at Teufelssee, the popular bathing spot.

Eyewitness Adele Landauer, who took photos of the incident, said there were plenty of nude sunbathers present when the wild boars appeared. As the unfortunate victim was bathing, they zeroed in on his unattended possessions and "calmly ate a pizza from his backpack." Afterwards "they were looking for a dessert" so they snatched his yellow plastic bag and were in the process of making off with it when the owner realised they were about to purloin his laptop.

Ms Landauer remarked that she and fellow onlookers had "adored how focused he stayed and when he came back with his yellow bag in hand we all clapped and congratulated him for his success."

The incident came just days after a bold urban fox, also in Berlin, was discovered to have walked off with dozens of pieces of leisure footwear, unwisely left outside in Berliners' gardens. For weeks, residents of Berlin suburb Zehlendorf were puzzled at the disappearance of flipflops and trainers which

were apparently disappearing at night. Eventually, a witness spotted the thief on a patch of wasteland "in flagrante, carrying two blue flip flops in its mouth", as reported in the daily paper *Tagesspiegel*. The fox was found to have accumulated a hoard of over 100 shoes.

The two episodes are amusing

reminders of the numerous ways in which urban animals have become more fearless during the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown, taking advantage of the relative absence of humans. There have been reports of wild boar making themselves at home in several Berlin suburbs. *BBC News*, 31 July. 8 Aug 2020.



ADELE LANDAUER / FACEBOOK

ADELE LANDAUER / FACEBOOK



WHAT'S UP DOC?

**MON 14 – SUN 20
SEPTEMBER**

**Buy a Jeans for Genes Day limited-
edition Bugs Bunny™ t-shirt at
jeansforgenesday.org/shop**

All profits from the sale of this t-shirt by
Jeans for Genes will help transform the
lives of children with life-altering
genetic disorders

Modelled by Georgia Toffolo

Jeans for Genes® and ™, © 2020 Genetic Disorders UK.
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LOONEY TUNES and all related characters and elements
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PAUL SIEVEKING looks at the latest London discoveries, plus unusual skulls from China and Ecuador

LONDON FINDS

Recent finds in east London have extended the capital's history by more than three millennia. Up until now, the birth of London has usually been seen only in terms of its establishment as a town at the time of the Roman conquest in the mid-first century AD; but archaeological investigations in Shoreditch, just 50ft (15m) outside the northern boundary of the historic City of London, have unearthed evidence of what appears to have been a ceremonial site dating to about 3600 BC. Traces of food on 436 potsherds from between 25 and 35 cooking and other vessels from the base of an extensive rubbish pit enable highly accurate dating based on chemical changes in fat deposits. Some pots were used for processing milk, probably in order to make cheese, butter and possibly alcoholic yoghurt-type beverages like central Asian and Steppeland Kumis or Kefir. A second type was used for making meat stew, probably beef.

Elsewhere in Britain, such Neolithic rubbish dumps are frequently associated with ritual ceremonial sites where large-scale feasting took place – and where symbolic samples of the feasting debris (including broken pottery) were often ritually deposited in pits or ditches. Over the past 20 years, a few pottery fragments from Neolithic pits, dating from 500 years after the Shoreditch site, have been found on Ludgate Hill, Cornhill, and Tower Hill; and at least half a dozen fine polished Neolithic stone axes (probably votive offerings to the spirits of the river) have been discovered on the Thames foreshore.

London's very name may offer a tantalising additional clue to some form of pre-Roman existence. Although the first town there

(*Londinium*) was evidently established by the Romans, the name is pre-Roman – probably either Celtic (*Lundinjon/Londonjon*), or even pre-Celtic and thus potentially rooted deep in prehistory. Geoffrey of Monmouth (c.1136) asserted the name derives from King Lud, who seized the city of Trinovantum and ordered it to be renamed after him – not a view supported by linguistics. One romantic etymology is *Luna din* ('moon fortress'), from an unsigned article in *The Cambro Briton* (1821). *Independent*, *D.Mail*, 9 April 2020.

- Excavations in east London over three months in 2019 revealed the Havering hoard, comprising 453 swords, axes, knives, chisels, sickles, razors, ingots and bracelets dating from 900 to 800 BC. It is the largest Bronze Age hoard ever discovered in the UK, with a total weight of 45kg (100lb). Of particular interest is a pair of terret rings believed to have been used to prevent the reins tangling on horse-drawn carts; similar examples have been found in France, but not in the UK. A bracelet is thought to be from north-west France, while copper ingots are possibly from the Alps, suggesting links to continental Europe. The hoard will go on display to the public for the first time from 11 September as part of the Museum of London exhibition, "Havering Hoard: A Bronze Age Mystery". *Guardian* 11 Feb 2020.

- In January, excavations on the site of a demolished storage facility at 85 Stepney Way, Whitechapel, east London, revealed remains of the Red Lion, the earliest commercial playhouse in Britain. It was built by John Brayne, a grocer and impresario, around 1567 and probably played host to

travelling groups of players. Nine years later, Brayne went on to construct the Theatre in nearby Shoreditch with his brother-in-law James Burbage, the father of the Elizabethan actor Richard Burbage. (The Theatre was the first permanent home for acting troupes and staged plays by Shakespeare in 1590. After a dispute, it was dismantled and its timbers used in the construction of the more famous Globe on Bankside in 1598.)

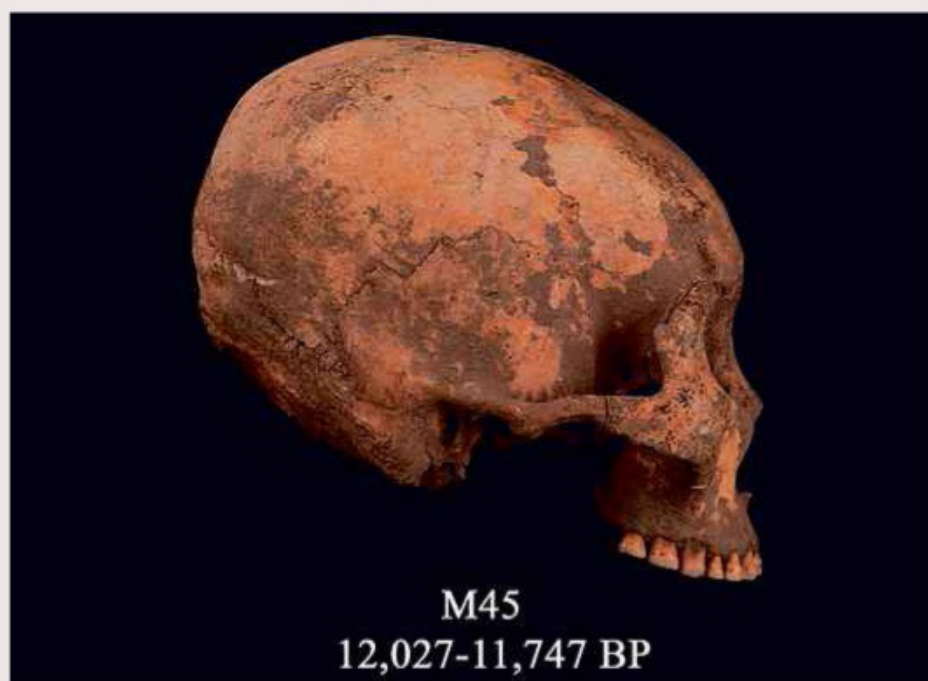
All that is known of the Red Lion comes from two 1560s lawsuits brought by some carpenters against Brayne, describing timber scaffolds or galleries around the stage. The stage measured 40ft (12.2m) north to south by 30ft (9.1m) east to west, at a height of 5ft (1.5m). The playhouse was part of a complex that included the Red Lion Inn. Among other discoveries are probable beer cellars as well as beakers, drinking glasses and tankards. Bone groups of dogs whose teeth had been filed down and other evidence suggest the playhouse was reused as a baiting pit in the 17th century. Little is known about what plays were performed at the Red Lion, apart from a fragment of evidence about one called *Samson*, a lost play by an unknown writer. *theguardian.com*, *Times*, *D.Mail*, 10 June; *Sunday Telegraph*, 14 June 2020.

ANCIENT GRID CITIES

The remains of a 5,000-year-old city have been discovered in Israel, the largest and oldest such find in the region. It was discovered during excavations preceding the construction of a new road 30 miles (48km) north of Tel Aviv. Archaeologists had been digging there for more than two and a half years, with 5,000 teenagers and volunteers participating. The city was home to 6,000 people and included



ABOVE LEFT: Uncovering the remains of the Red Lion, the first commercial theatre in Britain. ABOVE RIGHT: The Havering Hoard – the largest Bronze Age hoard found in the UK.



ABOVE LEFT: One of the 11 Neolithic skulls found at Houtaomuga, Jilin province, China, which showed signs of cranial modification. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A unique discovery was made in Salango, Ecuador, where a pair of infant skeletons were found wearing what appeared to be headgear made from the skulls of other juveniles.

planned roads, neighbourhoods, a ritual temple and fortifications. An even earlier settlement, believed to be 7,000 years old, was discovered beneath the city. “This is the Early Bronze Age New York of our region; a cosmopolitan and planned city where thousands of inhabitants lived,” said the excavation directors. Known as En Esur, the site spans 650 dunams (161 acres), about double the size of previous similar findings. The design of the city included designated residential and public areas, streets and alleys. About four million fragments were found at the site, including rare figurines of humans and animals, pieces of pottery and various tools, some of which came from Egypt. Burnt animal bones provided evidence of sacrificial offerings. [AP] *BBC News*, 7 Oct 2019.

- Researchers have identified the elusive ancient “lost city” of Cambodia – the first capital of the Khmer Empire in the eighth to ninth centuries AD. The city was thought to be located on the Phnom Kulen plateau, about 30 miles (48km) north of Siem Reap, but the region was remote, inaccessible, covered with vegetation, and potentially littered with landmines installed by the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. In two separate surveys – in 2012 and 2015 – the researchers used Lidar (aerial laser scans) and ground-based surveying to map the city, called Mahendraparvata or the Mountain of Indra, King of the Gods. A map shows the main paths and coordinate axes, a “sophisticated hydraulic system,” and the location of an unfinished reservoir, several dams, the enclosure walls of temples, monolithic statues and a palace. The city was built on linear axes that roughly correspond with the cardinal directions, like an early version of the modern city grid system. Earlier human settlements in the area had no formal

grid, no clear boundaries, and seem to have developed organically without planning. Mahendraparvata appears not to have been the capital for long because of the terrain. The heart of the Khmer Empire shifted to the city of Angkor. The discoveries were published in the journal *Antiquity*. *D.Telegraph*, 17 Oct; [CNN] 18 Oct 2019.

HUMAN HELMETS

Strange head coverings have been found on two 2,100-year-old infant skeletons uncovered between 2014 and 2016 in Salango, Ecuador – ‘helmets’ made of other juveniles’ skulls. Archaeologists describe the helmets as “mortuary headgear”, suggesting that they were used in burial rituals in the Guangala culture. The dig began after a local construction project disturbed a series of 11 burial sites along the coast. Historically, children were often given special burial treatment to preserve their “presocial and wild souls,” according to the report in the journal *Latin American Antiquity* (Nov 2019). “By treating deceased children in unusual or symbolic ways, people created and controlled their universes – given that children’s souls, in particular, acted as benefactors to the living and affected agricultural production, human fertility, and seasonal patterns of rain.” (This theory is supported by a 15th-century Peruvian dig site that contained the remains of 137 sacrificed children and 200 llamas – thought to be the largest mass sacrifice of children ever found. Small shells and stone ancestral figurines were placed around the children’s heads.)

There are plenty of examples of burials accompanied by additional skulls in South America, but until the Salango excavation none were used as headgear. While there isn’t any *direct* evidence to suggest that the Salango children were actually sacrificed, the burial site was found above a layer of

volcanic ash, suggesting a relationship to an eruption and subsequent food shortage. The skeletons showed signs of malnutrition. The infants might have been sacrificed as part of a larger ritual that was a direct response to the eruption. Based on how tightly the ‘helmet’ skulls were placed on the two infants’ heads, it’s likely that they still had flesh intact – otherwise they would not have stayed in place. *popularmechanics.com*, 25 Nov 2019.

CRANIAL MODIFICATION

At Houtaomuga in Jilin province, China, 11 of 25 Neolithic skulls dating from 12,000 to 5,000 years BP were artificially elongated, known as intentional cranial modification (ICM). The 11 individuals died between the ages of three and 40. Grave goods and funeral decorations suggested high social status. The three-year-old was buried with large amounts of pottery and other artefacts.

Permanent reshaping of a skull early in life, when the bones are soft, can be achieved by compressing an infant’s head by hand, binding the head with hard surfaces, or tightly wrapping the head in cloth. Deliberately modified skulls have been found all around the world, the earliest dating from 12,000 to 10,000 years BP in western Asia, southeastern Australia – and now East Asia. In the Americas, the practice appeared more than 8,000 years BP.

Houtaomuga was excavated from 2011 to 2015. A man’s skeleton with a modified skull was carbon-dated to between 12,027 and 11,747 years BP. Two sedimentary layers dating to between 6,300 and 5,000 years BP contained 10 skeletons with reshaped skulls. An adult and adolescent with modified skulls were buried together, suggesting that they were relatives. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 25 June; *sciencenews.org*, 3 July; *livescience.com*, 10 July 2019.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

251: WHACK-O!

(Titular tribute to ‘Professor’ Jimmy Edwards.)

“Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child” – Samuel Butler, *Hudibras* 1. 843. Often attributed to the Bible, this is Butler’s compression of six similar aphorisms in Proverbs (13.24, 19.18, 22.15, 23.13, 23.14, 29.15), a philosophy restated at Hebrews 12.6-7.

The sources show that from biblical to modern times, there were countless unspoiled children. For the record, I think a dose of their own medicine is ideal retribution for school bullies and the like. Would also like to scotch the myth that *le vice anglais* as the French call it is the result of schoolboy beatings turning into a fetish. As a much-caned survivor, I can state that the only feeling I got from it was the desire never to be beaten again. As Orwell – himself caned at Eton – wrote in 1984: “Of pain you could wish only one thing: that it should stop. In the face of pain there are no heroes.” We especially resented beatings from the prefects, often downright sadistic, as in such films as *IF...* and *Another Country*. Either way, always admired Billy Bunter’s optimism in trying to stuff Liddell & Scott’s *Greek Lexicon* down his check trousers to mitigate the agony.

Bible apart, flogging had a classical pedigree. An early vivid description comes in Mime 3 of Herondas (probably third-century BC, Alexandria) where Metrotima demands teacher Lampriskos thrash her son “until his last miserable breath hangs only on his lips” for his wretched school work. The master keenly obeys (“He shall get enough”), orders three other boys to hoist him up, calls for his “bull’s-pizzle” whip – the boy begs for the regular alternative of a fennel-cane – and gives him “as many blows as his wicked hide can stand,” leaving him “like a striped water-snake.” For an almost identical Victorian scene, see *Duffy’s Hibernian Magazine*, vol.2 (1861), p265, beginning “Mr Walker, having Jones hoisted comfortably, quickly organized the usual arrangements for flogging that boy...”

Roman poet Horace (*Epistles* bk2, no1, vv70-1) immortalised his teacher Orbilius as *plagosum* (Mr Strikey), as did another bard, Domitius Marsus, in his verse (quoted by Suetonius), “All those whom Orbilius thrashed with rod or leather whip.” Probably a belated consolation for his victims that Orbilius went senile in old age (nearly reached his century). Seems



equally symptomatic of various times that a British teachers’ association was called The Orbilian Society, and that it is now defunct.

Elsewhere (*Satires*, bk 1 no3 vv119-21), Horace distinguishes between cat ‘o nine tails, whip, strap, and cane. Orbilius was doubtless adept with all. A host of other Roman writers (Ovid, Juvenal, Macrobius, Sidonius, Jerome, Augustine) also speak feelingly of their beatings.

Some boys fought back. Juvenal (*Satire* 7, vv217-8) says that it was not uncommon for pupils to beat up their masters (cf. Mayor’s note for many parallels). Samuel Johnson (on record in Boswell for his “My master whip’t me very well; otherwise I should have learned nothing”) describes in his *Life of Addison* the “savage licence” with which the boys rioted, locked out the masters, jeering at them from the windows. One might even spare a tear for notorious Eton (1809-54) flogger John Keate, who once whacked 80 boys in a day, since he had to cope with a class of 170 which heckled his lessons, pelted him with eggs, and smashed up his desk.

Richard Busby (1606-95 – as myself, a classicist born in Lincolnshire) lashed his way through Westminster School (1639-95), his famous pupils including Dryden, Locke, and Wren, also Anglican priest Philip Henry who attributed his strong religiosity to Busby’s methods – epitome of muscular Christianity. In Pope’s *Dunciad* (bk4), Busby is satirised, his ghost appearing with a rod “dripping with infants’ blood”.

Johnson’s teacher, Hunter, summed up the moral case for these savageries: “This I do to save you from the gallows,” a philosophy latent in the long-continuing custom whereby – post-beating – pupil

and master shook hands, the former murmuring, “Thank you, Sir.”

Another modern remnant was at Trinity College, Dublin, where entering undergraduates were asked *Cuius sub ferula educatus?* (Under Whose Cane Were You Educated?). There were ancient objections. Top Roman educationalist Quintilian (1st-century AD) lays them out (*Institutes of Oratory*, bk1 ch3 paras13-7). The first will not appeal to modern sensibilities. Children should not be beaten, to distinguish them from slaves – we simply feel sorry for the latter. In more modern vein, he argues that corporal punishment leaves physical and mental traumas. Also, some children are at the mercy of sadistic masters. In the case of his near-contemporary teacher Remmius Palæmon, there was a worse danger: serial sexual abuse. As a quondam chalkbag, though, I can’t go along with his claim that flogging results from teachers’ incompetence rather than children’s faults.

No cad deserved flogging more than Flashman at Rugby. Despite Arnold’s reforms, Hughes’s *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* abounds in beatings by masters and prefects, a state of affairs that persists long afterwards in school stories; cf. Isabel Quigley’s admirable round-up, *The Heirs of Tom Brown* (1982). Indeed, the Duchess’s refrain in *Alice in Wonderland* (ch6) – “Speak roughly to your little boy / And beat him when he sneezes” – might well be taken as a sub-text for Victorian attitudes.

One notorious flogger in our time was Douglas Hurd, known as the Hitler of Eton for his enthusiastic punishments. Doubtless Mrs Thatcher regretted she could not turn his flagellant talents to correcting her ‘Wets’. But, old Salopian Anthony Chevenix-Trench takes the biscuit. From House-Master at Shrewsbury to Headmasterships at Eton and Fettes, he was notorious not only for whippings but for “the sensuous fingering of his pupils’ buttocks before and during” – the phrase is Paul Foot’s review of his biography, *London Review of Books* (5 Sept 1996, p25). Sacked from Eton for this in 1970, Chevenix-Trench simply moved to a reign at Fettes the following year. Alas, too late to apply his talents to departing pupil Tony Blair, though there is some consolation to be had from his teachers’ reports cited in John Rentoul’s biography (2001) – “They all called him a complete pain in the backside.”

THE C NSPIRASPHERE

The idea that Russia influenced the 2016 US elections and the Brexit referendum is widely accepted as 'the truth'. **NOEL ROONEY** suggests that it looks more like a conspiracy theory.

RUSSIAGATE REVISITED

When Richard Hofstadter wrote about the 'paranoid style' in American politics, he attributed this mode of thinking to the more marginal groups in the political landscape. Jesse Walker, in the magisterial *United States of Paranoia*, showed that the paranoid style was by no means confined to the lunatic fringes of American politics; governments, and the major parties, are equally prone to seeing shadowy forces at work in the darker recesses of history. Curiously, it is Hofstadter's narrower, more biased definition that has held the foreground in studies of conspiracy theory, and given rise to such truisms as 'conspiracy theory is for losers'.

In the current world of American politics, a very particular set of assumptions has polarised the already bipartisan paranoia; for the Democrats, all things bad begin with Russia, while for the Republicans, the Chinese are the shadowy bad guys. Thus public figures on the right can happily endorse conspiracy theories about the origin and spread of Covid-19, while eminent Democrats can fulminate about evidence-free stories such as the Russians paying bounties to Afghan fighters for targeting American personnel. While these party-specific animosities have always been around, we could consider 2016 as the year when they hit the big time.

The notion that the Russian government actively influenced the 2016 US presidential election, and the UK Brexit referendum in the same year, has passed seamlessly from partisan rumour through media hype to conventional wisdom – without, apparently, passing through the stage of fact checking – to the point where it serves as



All good conspiracy theories contain a germ of truth

axiomatic background to almost any speculative story involving Putin, the Russian government, or Russians in general. This is the kind of trajectory which, if it emanated from the far right and involved our own governments, we might normally associate with conspiracy theory.

Where facts have been checked – by the courts, and by some independent investigative journalists – it has become clear that concrete evidence of Russian interference in the US elections, or for that matter the Brexit referendum, is somewhat lacking. An investigation into the hacking of a DNC (Democratic National Congress) email server, the alleged incident that kicked off the Russiagate juggernaut, concluded there was no evidence of the Russians having hacked the system; in fact, there was no evidence that anyone had done so. A court review of the evidence that the Trump campaign had colluded with the Russians came up similarly empty-

handed. An enquiry into the FBI's surveillance of one of the alleged main players in the Trump/Russia thing showed, somewhat embarrassingly, that the person in question was in fact working for the CIA at the time.

The document on which the mainly Democrat accusers based their claim that the Donald was tantamount to a Russian spy, written by a British ex-diplomat named Christopher Steele, claimed that it derived its accusations from a Russian source. This source was apparently so well-connected they knew exactly which Moscow hotel bed Mr Trump had urinated on. Recently, it has emerged that the 'source' was in fact an employee of Mr Steele, was not Russian, and was largely speculating (a relief to Moscow hotel laundry workers at least). In time to come, history may characterise the early 21st century as the age of the dodgy dossier.

Here is another characteristic that Russiagate shares with conspiracy theories; refuting the evidence is no obstacle to the progress of the story, and has no apparent effect on the people who believe it. As I'm writing this column, a Senate report (a whacking 1,000 pages of it) has been published that attempts to resurrect the story of Russian interference in American politics. Again, it relies on hearsay rather than concrete evidence, and it rumbles over the same tried and untested ground that previous iterations have fruitlessly ploughed. And as if to cement this institutional paranoia into the gaudy edifice of American realpolitik, a recent analysis by US intelligence (needless to say, I use the terms 'analysis' and 'intelligence' advisedly here) has concluded that, if Trump wins the next election, the Russians did it; while if Biden

triumphs, it was the Chinese. This kind of bifurcated logic, designed to sidestep Occam's sadly underused razor, is characteristic of many conspiracist arguments. But when it is reported in the *New York Times* (the original media outlet for many puff pieces attributed to sources in US intelligence) it passes for intel-based wisdom. So no double standard there, then.

All good conspiracy theories, of course, contain a germ of truth. It will come as a shock to very few readers to learn that the world's more powerful nations regularly interfere in the electoral processes of other countries, including their rivals. The US has, by its own admission, been meddling in Russian elections since 1996, when at a cost of \$250,000 per day (compare that to the sums alleged to have been invested by Russians in 2016) it helped to ease the genial Boris Yeltsin into power (and thus enabled an incompetent drunk to oversee the looting of the country's resources by the Oligarchs, all in the name of the free market).

Does Russiagate qualify as a conspiracy theory? I think it does. And does it (as conspiracy theory is regularly accused of doing) present a threat to democracy as we know it? Not at all; baseless paranoia is simply part of the process.

SOURCES: <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/>; <https://thegrayzone.com/2020/07/25/uk-russia-report-fear-mongers-about-meddling-yet-finds-no-evidence/#more-29593>; www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-53784048; <https://medium.com/@caityjohnstone/us-intelligence-if-trump-wins-russia-did-it-if-biden-wins-it-was-china-and-iran-2fde3d11e15d>; www.zerohedge.com/political/declassified-christopher-steeles-primary-sub-source-was-his-own-employee-nyt-russiagate.



This sporting afterlife

ALAN MURDIE finds a rich vein of ghostlore running through the nation's obsession with sport



ABOVE LEFT: Arthur Conan Doyle had a keen interest not just in psychic phenomena but in competitive sports; here, he is bowled out by AP Lucas (*The Strand Magazine*, Sept 1909). **ABOVE RIGHT:** Arthur Shrewsbury shot himself in 1903 and is said to be actively haunting a house in Norfolk in 2018.

Earlier this year, the famous international Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) in Sydney, Australia, took to Facebook and the press to announce a haunting centring upon its Ladies' Pavilion. This section of the ground opened in 1896 and is monitored 24 hours a day. Despite these precautions, patrolling guards have become uneasy at lights switching on spontaneously and doors mysteriously opening and closing by themselves. A security dog refuses to enter the area on certain nights. The ghost of an old woman in a veil is reputed to appear at dusk. The story goes that she was a widow whose cricket-loving son was killed during World War II. Until the end of her life she obsessively attended the SCG, being reminded of him by the young men playing out on the field. After her death, her ghost is said to have lingered in the Ladies' Pavilion, forever watching for her son to appear. (Sources: Facebook TG20 posting, Mar 2020; *Daily Telegraph*, 28 Oct 2016).

Since then, the SCG, along with countless thousands of other stadia, pitches, ballparks, playing fields and games halls across the world, have fallen silent. Innumerable sporting matches, games, tournaments and trophy contests, public and private, amateur and professional up to the Olympic

A ghostly young boy dressed in cricket whites walks the halls of Felpham Manor

Games itself, have all been cancelled or postponed and their venues abandoned. Many grounds, halls and temples of games and sports may never re-open... leaving them to just who or what after darkness falls?

It might be presumed that such robustly embodied activities as physical sports, athletics and games lie at an extreme opposite to the incorporeal psychic spiritual realm, but not a bit of it. Sporting life may be solidly anchored in the physical world, but its links to the ghostly realm turn out to be long established, diverse and extensive.

One who would have appreciated such connections was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Co-existing with his passion for the psychic was his personal enthusiasm and marked accomplishments in certain sports and games. Obituaries in 1930 of the great writer and greatest Spiritualist champion all recorded how he "took a great interest in

local sports, specially cricket and billiards." (*Londonderry Sentinel*, 8 July 2014). Further links are easy to discover, starting with Sir Arthur's own listed favourites.

Apparitions may appear in full-cricketing kit. For example, on a bright moonlight night in January 1885, a Mr John Husbands of Grimsby staying at the Motta Marques Hotel, Madeira, awoke in his bedroom to see "a young fellow about 25, dressed in flannels, standing at the side of my bed and pointing with the first finger of his right hand to the place I was lying."

Husbands sat up and at once demanded what the intruder wanted. The form did not speak, "but his eyes and hand seemed to tell me I was in his place." Receiving no reply, Husbands decided a robust response was necessary. "I struck out at him with my fist as I sat up, but did not reach him, and as I was going to spring out of bed he slowly vanished through the door, which was shut, keeping his eyes upon me all the time."

A few days later, Husbands was able to identify his nocturnal visitor as the same man in a photograph shown him by a Miss Falkner, depicting a young man 'a Mr D——' who, unknown to Mr Husbands, had died unexpectedly months previously, in the same bedroom. Miss Falkner stated separately that "Mr Husbands is a most

practical man, and the very last one would expect ‘a spirit’ to visit.” (*SPR Journal*, vol.3, April 1887).

A phantom cricketer crosses the A5 near the former Pack Horse Inn at Kensworth near Dunstable. There was a fatal accident in 1958. The driver of a mini-bus carrying the cricket team of the Kenwood company swerved to overtake a car and crashed. Two members of the cricket team were killed and others badly injured. In 1973 a taxi driver driving over the spot was shocked when a man in ‘white clothes’ stepped in front of his vehicle. Braking sharply, he was unable to avoid hitting the figure. On leaving his taxi, he found no trace of any person. Since then, there have been other reports of a cricketer appearing at the same spot. The apparition is believed to be either that of Sidney Moulder or Gary Rytcher, both killed in the 1958 crash (*Ghosts of Today*, 1980, by Andrew Green).

A ghostly young boy dressed in cricket whites reputedly walks the halls of Felpham Manor House in Bognor Regis and also appears in the room in which he died surrounded by cricketing memorabilia and pictures. He has been identified as Kenrick Clayton, who died from pneumonia at the house on 13 February 1909. His portrait, dressed in his cricket clothes, still survives. (See <https://manorhousefelpham.com/2012/10/27/ghost-at-the-manor-house-identity-revealed/> 27 Oct 2012)

Probably the most famous Victorian-era cricketer currently claimed as returning is Arthur Shrewsbury, who shot himself in 1903 at a house in Gedling, Nottinghamshire. A couple, who moved in during 2018, reported three pairs of glasses smashing on a carpeted floor and objects dropping from cupboards at night. They also heard footsteps when the rest of



ABOVE: The Lumley Castle Hotel, County Durham, has seen visiting cricketers “caught by the ghoulies”.

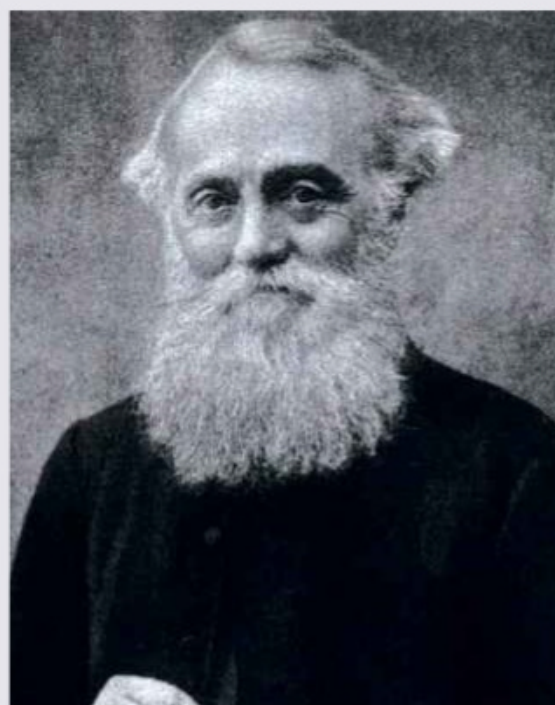
the house was empty. This prompted them to contact a TV psychic show to come and film in their home. (*Gedling Eye*, 6 Nov 2019).

In October 2014, a former groundsman at Harborne Cricket Club reported strange manifestations there before his retirement in 2012. Mr Trevor Townsend recalled: “I was at a table in the old pavilion going through the fixtures. There were beer mats on the table when suddenly one of them began to slowly move diagonally. I was so shocked I shouted, ‘If you’re so clever, do it again’. Of course, he didn’t.”

Even more dramatic was an incident in the kitchen when a wicker basket in a wok “rose into the air and hit another employee on the head. Hardly cricket, one might

think. The man did not wish to remain thereafter.” Spectators alleged a phantom walks the grounds, a 19th century vicar the Rev Edward ‘Moses’ Roberts who served as priest at Harborne church between 1858 and 1891. (*Birmingham Mail*, 13 Oct 2014; *D.Mirror*, 27 Oct 2016).

When it comes to ghostly experiences for living cricketers, inevitably those involving the national sporting team receive most attention. In June 2005 Australian cricketer Shane Watson was alarmed staying in a haunted hotel. “Scared dinkum – Aussies caught by the ghoulies at ‘haunted’ hotel,” was a predictably restrained back-page headline in the *Sun* (21 June 2005). The Lumley Castle Hotel is haunted by Lily of Lumley,



ABOVE LEFT: Kenrick Clayton, whose ghostly figure is said to walk the halls of Felpham Manor House dressed in cricket whites. **ABOVE CENTRE:** Rev Edward ‘Moses’ Roberts supposedly haunts the old pavilion at Harborne Cricket Club. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Australian cricketer Shane Watson was spooked in 2005.

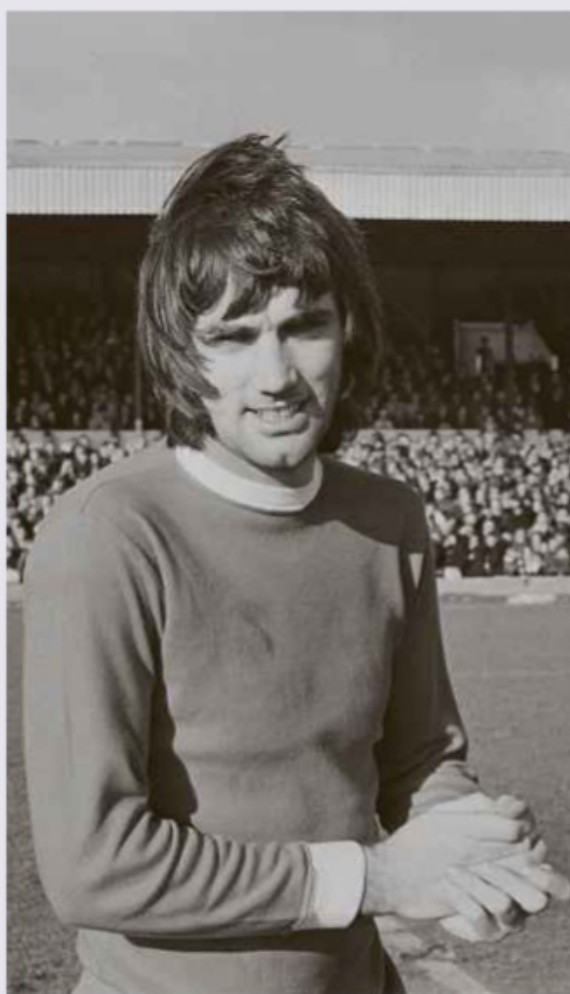


GHOSTWATCH

a 14th century aristocrat supposedly “murdered by Catholic priests”. Five years earlier, members of a West Indian cricket side reputedly changed hotels because of strange phenomena. Ghosts which disturbed members of the English cricket team at the Langham Hotel in London have been referenced in a previous column in 2014 (see Ghostwatch **FT320:14-15**).

Cricketers are not alone in their experiences. Members of the Welsh national rugby squad were troubled by spooky events at the Oatlands Park Hotel, Surrey, in 2015. One player, Dan Lydiate, said he had seen a ghost in room 1313, “the one that apparently has temperature changes and a couple of paranormal things happen”, according to team captain Sam Warburton. “I haven’t experienced anything yet, but a few of the boys have,” he said. Some of his team apparently thought it could have been Henry VIII. Suggestion might have played a part. “Our physio was in there. He was fine until we made him aware of it.” (*International Business Times*, 7 Oct 2015).

Just what Henry VIII – who enjoyed, hunting, jousting, tennis and throwing the hammer – would have made of rugby is anyone’s guess. I think he would look askance at soccer too, football having a poor reputation amongst mediæval and Tudor monarchs (hence the Shakespearean insult “you base football player” – *King Lear*, Act I, Scene IV) who introduced measures to suppress it. This was one reason for surprise at the spontaneous urban legend suggesting the disinterred and solemnly reburied Richard III had brought good fortune to the Leicester team after his remains were unearthed from a carpark near their King Power Stadium in 2015 (**FT299:4-5**;



TOP: George Best. **ABOVE:** The Seventies football star has reportedly made a number of post-mortem appearances. **BELOW:** Sir Arthur Conan Doyle enjoys a game of billiards – a sport that has its own surprising repertoire of ghost stories.

see also Rob Gandy, “Power to the King, **FT342:56-57**; “The King’s Power: Did the digging up of Richard III lead Leicester to the Premier League title?” *Sun*, 3 May 2016). The subsequent tragedy with the death of the owner of Leicester football club and three others in a helicopter crash in 2018 seems to have quashed these stories.

Other haunted football stadia are documented, with the *Daily Mirror* listing at Hallowe’en 2016 Reading, Plymouth and Sunderland. Probably most famous is Arsenal football club’s Emirates stadium, through which the ghostly footsteps of past manager Herbert Chapman (died 1934) are said to reverberate. In life, Chapman was responsible for many promotional innovations, his most notable being achieving a re-naming of the nearest tube station as ‘Arsenal’ as an advertising gimmick. Stories of him haunting the Arsenal ground reached their zenith in 2010 with three fans and one player from rival Crystal Palace holding a Ouija séance attempting to make contact (*The Londonist*, 29 Oct 2010). Such tales are traceable back to at least 1982 with a *Times* report averring measured steps round the stand, through the boardroom, the cocktail bar and the press room (*Times*, 29 Jan 1982), first supposedly reported by staff in the years immediately after Chapman’s death.

Individual sportsmen may also make occasional post-mortem returns. Pride of place in recent years goes to 1970s football star George Best (1946-2005), though these stories perhaps owe more to wishful thinking and financial motives blended with embellishments of sports-fixated male journalists unable to resist effortless copy (covering sports being far more pleasurable for many male news hounds than science or industrial analysis, for instance). These stories began prior to Best expiring, when his ‘mistress’ Gina Devivo told journalists, “George will haunt me from the grave” several weeks before his actual death. His former wife Alex Best, to whom he was married between 1995 and 2004, recounted manifestations at her cottage at Kingswood, Surrey. She suffered taps turning on, the switching on of lights, moving furniture and her keys and mobile phone vanishing. However, she doubted later it was her celebrated former spouse and blamed another spirit.

Neither had the deceased player lost his infamous addiction to alcohol. Former agent and friend Phil Hughes blamed Best’s ghost for moving his drinks cabinet whilst the licensees at the Red Lion in Petersfield, Hampshire, accused Best’s spirit of upsetting drinks in the bar where he regularly inebriated himself in life. Calling in a medium revealed money and



disputes over his inheritance and “the bickering between his family and former agent and his former wife Alex Best” had prompted him to haunt.

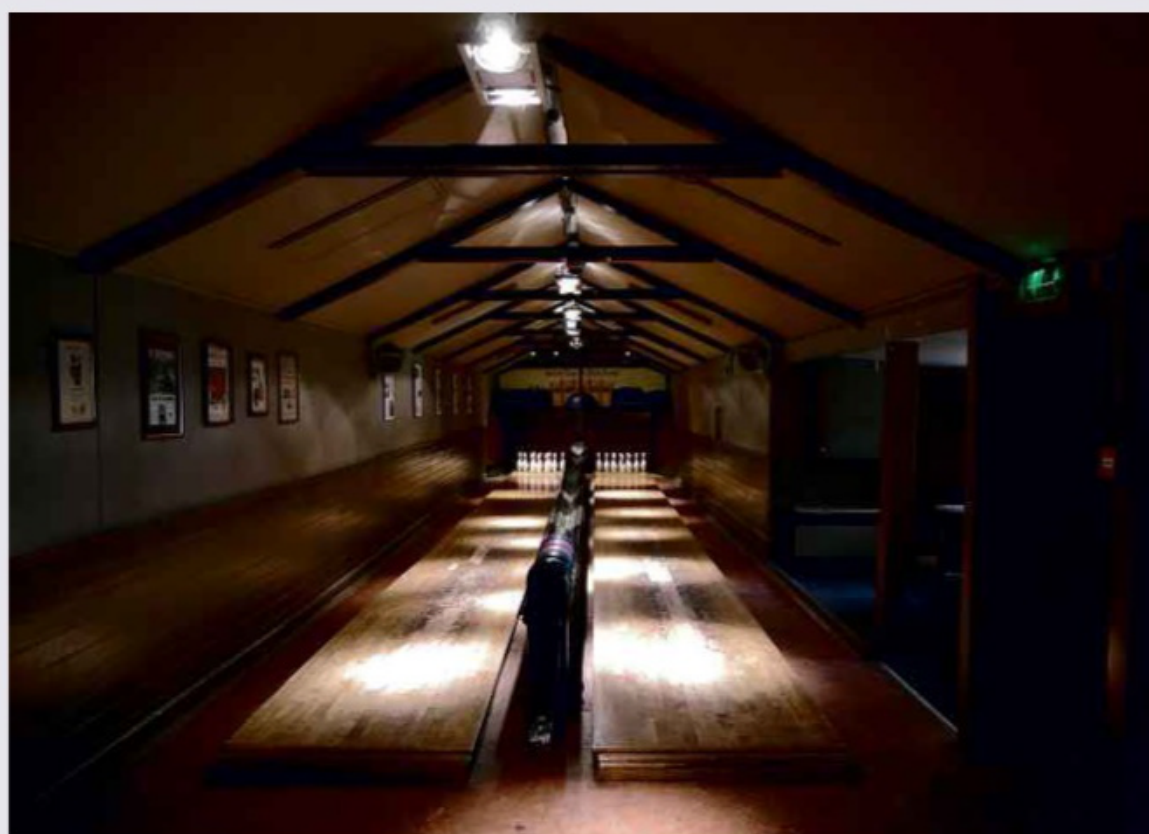
Folklorists may recognise such motifs as coming straight from 17th or 18th century ghost lore; revenants troubled by testamentary and inheritance disputes have dwindled ever since the enactment of the Wills Act 1845 (*Daily Star*, 9 Oct 2005, 12 Mar 2006, *Hindustan Times*, 4 Dec 2006, *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 3+15 Feb 2017).

No one thought to ask Best his predictions for scores in future soccer matches. ‘Eric’ the Andover poltergeist, which invaded a family home, rapped out answers to questions such as “Which football team is going to win the F.A. Cup final?” and the results of forthcoming horse races. However, when investigating, Dr Barrie Colvin found the father not very forthcoming and the results unimpressive. Successful poltergeist predictions that Leeds and Liverpool teams would win major trophies that year “could have been guessed by any knowledgeable football supporter.” (*The Andover Case: A Responsive Rapping Poltergeist* [2008] no.890 vol.82. 1-20).

If you prefer gentler and indoor games and pursuits, Sir Arthur’s other favourite, billiards, proves particularly well-represented in ghost reports, all the way back to 1888 when a Mrs Fry told the SPR of unaccountable noises at the family seat in Darlington, especially billiard balls “cannoning when no one is playing” (*Journal of the SPR*, vol.6, April 1893). Phantom billiard players manifest worldwide, from the ghostly old man playing billiards and sounds of clicking of balls at Hyde Lad’s Club, Cheshire (*Manchester Evening News*, 31 July 1968) to Cue Spot Billiards in Merced, California, where players blame a spook, “possibly someone who didn’t pay a debt after losing” for disrupting their shots (*Merced Sun-Star*, 23 Oct 2016). At the haunted Savoy Hotel in Mussoorie, India, a ghostly “pit-a-pat of balls hitting cues can be heard” (*The Pioneer*, India, 7 Jan 2016).

The most unlikely of stories was received by Dennis Bardens when editing *Soldier* magazine during the early 1960s. Entitled “I was a hundred up to a ghost”, the story was supplied by a living army officer named Lt Col. O’Doneven, who claimed to have played a game of billiards with a ghostly soldier dead for 27 years. Lt Col. O’Doneven claimed that in 1943 he had been billeted at a manor house in the Midlands where, one evening before dinner, he heard the sound of billiard balls being clicked about, emanating from another room.

Pushing open the door, O’Doneven



ABOVE: Even bowling alleys have their complement of ghosts, such as this fine example at the Sheep Heid Inn in Edinburgh, said to be haunted by a now deceased customer.

The Victorian alley is “drenched in stories of phantom bowlers and skittle pickers”

entered a longish room with a billiard table at which stood a ‘humpbacked’ young man dressed in Kitchener Army ‘Blues’ from World War I. O’Doneven invited him to a game and the young man at once commenced playing against him, though he did not speak. On reaching 98 all, O’Doneven heard other officers arriving. Taking his shot, “a sure pot at his ball or the gentlemanly cannon shot off red to white”, O’Doneven saw the young soldier return his cue to the rack with a smile and quietly walk through another door, “into what I afterwards discovered was a bathroom.”

Later across the dinner table, O’Doneven casually asked his mess-mates, “Any of you seen the little chap in Blues?” No other officers had. O’Doneven added, “A nice lad with a hump. I’ve just beaten him at billiards.” At his words the old butler, on the point of serving an apple tart, froze. Turning pale, he declared, “You’ve seen Master Willie, sir.” The aged butler explained that ‘Master Willie’ had been “her Ladyship’s brother”, who had enlisted with Kitchener’s Army in 1915, but was soon dismissed on account of his deformity. Depressed with rejection, he returned to the house and shot

himself in the billiards room at Christmas 1916. A perfect ghost story, but one rather troubling because of its interactive apparition. Still I have resolved to see if it is possible to trace anything, further, after all one never knows...

Alternatively, one might fancy ghostly skittles or bowls. Both the marvellous Sheep Heid Inn at Edinburgh and the ancient Holman Clavel Inn, Somerset, are among places boasting haunted skittle alleys. At the Sheep Heid Inn (reputedly the oldest pub in Scotland) the spectre is a deceased customer (who also has a favourite seat), while the phantom skittle player in Somerset is reputedly a monk (see *Haunted Edinburgh*, 2007, by Alan Murdie and *New Reveille*, 20 July 1973).

A Victorian bowling alley beneath the old Royal Naval College at Greenwich is “drenched in stories of phantom bowlers and skittle pickers” (*The Londonist*, 27 April 2009). The Rosenheim poltergeist that manifested in a lawyer’s office in Bavaria in 1967-68 reputedly followed its focus, a 19-year-old woman named Anne Marie, out of the building to disrupt the electronic scoring system at her fiancé’s favourite bowling alley. Parapsychologists considered the phenomena may have been a PK display contrived to get him away from the bowling ground. If so, it failed, for their relationship ended.

Much more could be written on ghostly sporting angles, of haunted manifesting on golf courses, race tracks, swimming baths and even a phantom game of shinty played in a Scottish glen, but space does not permit. Accordingly, I will return to other examples in due course.



FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Another disastrous art 'restoration', spiritual scammers at large, and new 'Oumuamua theory



ABOVE: Two attempts to 'restore' the face of the Virgin Mary in a painting of the Immaculate Conception; neither can be accounted a resounding success.

FRESCO FIASCO [FT294:12]



The ignoble catalogue of catastrophic art restorations continues to grow. Conservation

experts in Spain are calling for laws governing restoration work to be tightened after a copy of a famous painting by baroque artist Bartolomé Esteban Murillo became the latest in a long line of artworks to suffer a damage and disfigurement during 'repair'.

A private art collector in Valencia was reportedly charged 1,200 euros (£1,090) by a furniture restorer (!) to clean their copy of a painting of the Immaculate Conception, but the face of the Virgin Mary was left unrecognisable despite two attempts to restore her to her original state.

This latest fiasco has inevitably been compared with the infamous 'Monkey Christ' incident of 2012 (see FT294:12), when a devout but hapless parishioner attempted to restore a 1930 fresco depicting the scourged Christ on the wall of her local church. Cecilia Giménez's botched restoration of Elias Garcia Martinez's 'Ecce Homo' in the Santuario de Misericordia church near Borja made world headlines.

Parallels have also been drawn with the shambolic restoration of a 16th-century wooden statue of Saint George in a church in Estella, northern Spain. An arts and crafts teacher was hired to freshen up the sculpture, but left the warrior saint looking more like Tintin.

Professor Fernando Carrera, of Galicia's School for the Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage, said such

cases highlighted the need for work to be carried out only by properly trained restorers. "I don't think this guy – or these people – should be referred to as restorers," he said. "Let's be honest: they're bodgers who botch things up. They destroy things".

Prof Carrera, a former president of Spain's Professional Association of Restorers and Conservators (ACRE), pointed out that Spanish law currently allows people to engage in restoration projects even if they lack the necessary skills. "Can you imagine just anyone being allowed to operate on other people? Or someone being allowed to sell medicine without a pharmacist's licence?" he asked.

Such incidents are "unfortunately far more common than you might think" according to María Borja, an ACRE's vice-president. "We only find out about them when people report them to the press or on social media, but there are numerous situations when works are undertaken by people who aren't trained." *theguardian.com*, 22 June; *BBC News*, 23 June 2020.

'OUMUAMUA AGAIN [FT362:24; 363:13]



Two Yale astrophysicists have suggested that 'Oumuamua, the mysterious cigar-shaped interstellar object that first appeared in our Solar System in 2017, may be an iceberg. Their research traces 'Oumuamua's origins to a giant molecular cloud, massive stellar nurseries that can stretch for light years, containing enough gas to form tens of thousands of stars. But postdoctoral researcher Darryl Seligman and his co-author and PhD adviser, astrophysicist Gregory Laughlin, argue that such molecular clouds may also produce hydrogen icebergs resembling 'Oumuamua in appearance and behaviour.

"Even though the hydrogen iceberg thing is a little exotic, it explains every single mysterious thing about 'Oumuamua", said Seligman. If they are correct, 'Oumuamua would not only be the first interstellar object to have been discovered, but the first hydrogen iceberg. Hydrogen typically exists as a gas, but if it becomes cold enough, can solidify. It freezes at around -450°F (-267.8°C), just a few degrees above absolute zero.

The only known regions of the Universe cold enough for this phase transition to occur are the dense, icy centres of giant molecular clouds. A cloud's core has a relatively short lifespan, just a few hundred thousand years, before it is eroded by the 'churn' of the galaxy and disappears. But their theory argues that this comparatively brief period is sufficient for frozen hydrogen molecules to latch onto dust in the cloud, building up a large block of ice. It would take a few hundred thousand years to produce an iceberg just a few hundred metres long. NASA researchers have calculated 'Oumuamua to be less than 800m (875yds) long.

The iceberg theory would also explain 'Oumuamua's strange cigar shape. After the molecular cloud's core has dissipated and the iceberg is set adrift, it's constantly bombarded by cosmic radiation, chipping away at it from some directions more than others, resulting, the two researchers argue, in a more elongated form. Seligman likens it to a bar of soap which becomes more flat and oval as it is used.

Their hydrogen iceberg theory may also explain why 'Oumuamua began speeding up as it entered our Solar System, something that wasn't explicable by gravity alone. One theory had suggested 'Oumuamua was being propelled by gases rapidly boiling off from space rocks, a phenomenon called outgassing, which creates comets' brilliant

tails, typically composed of carbon dioxide and water. But outgassing sufficient to cause ‘Oumuamua’s acceleration wasn’t detected by observers; unless, that is, it was emitting pure hydrogen – which wouldn’t be detectable by the observation telescopes. *wired.com*, 29 May; *nationalinterest.org*, 3 June 2020.

SCAM DIGEST [FT391:28-29]



Fake spiritual healers have been exploiting Australia’s Russian and Eastern European communities, targeting older Russian women in Melbourne. They are said to pray over jewellery and cash prior to stealing them, having switched the valuable items for worthless substitutes.

Detective Senior Constable James Bartholomeusz said two women had both been tricked by a group of three women who stole their property. He said the offenders are believed to have told victims they could heal them by packaging their cash and jewellery, and then praying over it at a particular location.

One victim, called Inga, who moved from Russia to Australia 26 years ago, said she “felt empty” after being conned out of cash and jewellery. She had been in a shopping centre when an elderly Russian-speaking woman approached her, asking her to sit down and talk. “She held my hand and said you have a problem,” Inga recalled. The stranger said “You’re having troubles with your family,” and told Inga to “go home and get everything you have, take your husband’s money, whatever you have bring it,” so that she could “fix her problems.”

At that point, a younger woman appeared, saying they would all drive together to Inga’s home to collect money and valuables for the elderly healer. When Inga produced the cash, the younger woman allegedly pressurised her into

finding more. “You’re a liar, you have more, take from your husband, take from your kids,” Inga was told.

The scammers told her to put her jewellery and cash into a scarf. They then drove back to the shopping centre where the elderly woman prayed over the wrapped-up valuables. At some point during the proceedings, the scarf was switched. Inga was told to keep the scarf wrapped up for 40 days and then return to the shopping centre for another meeting. She did so, showing up at the same spot, but no one was there. Opening the scarf, she saw that it contained only stones.

“I felt empty, not stressed or shocked but... I believe people, that’s my problem,” said the duped Inga. When she reported the crime to police, investigators told her that other victims had lost up to \$80,000 AUD (\$56,000 US, £46,000) worth of cash and valuables.

Police have released CCTV footage of three women they believe may be able to help with their investigation. *abc.net.au*, 4 June 2020.

EASY AS ABC [FT395:8-9]



A serval was captured in the Japanese city of Shizuoka after about two weeks on the loose. The one-year-old felid, native to Africa, was being kept as an exotic pet in the city, but escaped on 27 June. Officials said a witness had alerted the authorities after spotted the serval wandering near Shizuoka Heliport, over half a mile (0.8km) from its owner’s home. It was safely captured without injury.

The serval’s owner apparently told authorities that the cat had been acting in an agitated manner, and had escaped when the owner opened its cage. A permit is required to keep a serval in the city. It was unclear whether the felid’s owner had a permit or not. *[UPI] upi.com*, 13 July 2020.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

253: IN LINE TO THE THRONE



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

We are all in line to the throne. A commoner’s chances of actually copping the gig may be slight, but if the entire royal clan and several million citizens were to go over a cliff in an unforgivably overcrowded minibus, the rest of us would all move up the queue a bit.

The “truth”

The line of succession to the throne of the United Kingdom is not, sadly, infinite. The romantic idea that, like the plot of an old Ealing comedy, genealogists might turn up on the doorstep of a poodle-groomer in Wolongong to inform her that she’s now the Queen, is false. The choice of who becomes monarch of the 16 realms which recognise the British queen or king as head of state is, ultimately, a matter for Parliament, as established by the Act of Settlement 1701. The candidates for monarch must meet certain criteria, the most significant of which is that they must be in communion with the Church of England, and the most hilariously anachronistic of which is that they must be a direct descendant of Princess Sophia, Electress of Hanover, who was born in the Hague in 1613 and died in Hanover in 1740. The nearest thing to an official pop chart of succession is that maintained by the UK government’s website. This runs to 18 names, beginning with The Prince of Wales and ending with Mrs Michael Tindall. It is arguable that there are several thousand legitimate, Protestant descendants of Sophia currently walking the Earth, but even if that is allowed, the rest of us are simply not in the running.

Disclaimer

Constitutional truths are inherently contestable. If you are 48,000,014th in line, and you can prove it, please let us know.

Sources www.royal.uk/succession; www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704889404576276502793788310

Mythchaser

Chefs instruct us to tear basil leaves rather than cut them. But is this genuine flavour-related molecular science, a reader asks, or just cooks being all poncey?





RELIGION ROUND-UP | Death of a yogi, thrash metal drummer's trip to Hell, Satan's voice recorded, plus: you can be Pope!

POPE SIMULATOR

A new video game is being developed which will allow players to live out their papal fantasies and try to achieve world peace. A trailer for *Pope Simulator*, currently in production by software company Ultimate Games, shows white smoke emanating from a chimney, the sign that a new Pope has been elected. Gamers begin their first day as Pope choosing their coat of arms, and will live out the daily activities of the Pontiff, including saying prayers and giving blessings. As Pope, they will also be granted access to the Vatican library, said to contain secret and suppressed writings that, if revealed, would shatter the Roman Catholic Church's authority, and possibly the authority of Christianity as a whole.

The player is faced with a series of choices to make and will have the freedom to implement their own view of the world, and to intervene in global politics by meeting world leaders. "Make decisions that will weigh on the fate of humanity, convert and support the crowds," the trailer says. "Plan the Church's strategic actions through faithful envoys. Manage your travels around the

globe. Fight for peace." But each decision affecting the world's fate comes at a price – although such actions strengthen the faith of others, the Pope loses strength by performing such deeds and must replenish his energy levels through prayer.

Perhaps significantly, the Ultimate Games company is based in Poland, where a whole generation remembers St John Paul II, the Polish pontiff who played a significant role in the dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact countries regaining their independence.

"The Pope has no military or economic power behind him, but he has other means of influencing the world," said Mateusz Zawadzki, the company's CEO. "Our idea assumes the possibility to use, among others, the so-called soft power, and consequently influence the fate of the world and intervene in international politics."

Pope Simulator isn't the only game with an explicitly Christian theme. Publisher Playway, a major investor in Ultimate Games, have themselves created a game called *I Am Jesus Christ*, in which players travel the world performing miracles. *D.Mail*, 23 Apr 2020.



SAM PANTHAKY / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

MALE YOGI 'GODDESS' DIES

An Indian yogi who claimed to have spent decades without food or water died in May 2020, apparently aged 90. The long-haired and bearded Prahlad Jani, who lived in Charada village in Gujarat state, spent his life

practising yoga and meditation, dressed in red, and wore a nose ring like a Hindu goddess.

After being pronounced dead, his body was taken to Ambaji, a town renowned for its temples, where he was known as 'Mataji' (goddess). His body was kept in the ashram he had built there for two days while his devotees paid their last respects before his cremation.

Jani claimed to have been blessed by a goddess as a child, enabling him to live without sustenance, telling journalists he obtained the "elixir of life from the hole in my palate, which enables me to go without food and water." Medical professionals were naturally sceptical, on the basis that a person cannot go for long periods without food or water before severe organ damage sets in, leading to death. After the first three days, the liver starts processing body fat; once this has been depleted, muscles and vital organs become sources of energy, until loss of bone marrow becomes life-threatening.

Nevertheless, despite medical



TOP: Prahlad Jani, who claimed to have lived for decades without food or water, photographed during a 2010 press conference.

ABOVE: The forthcoming *Pope Simulator* game offers players the chance to try their hand at being a successful Pontiff.



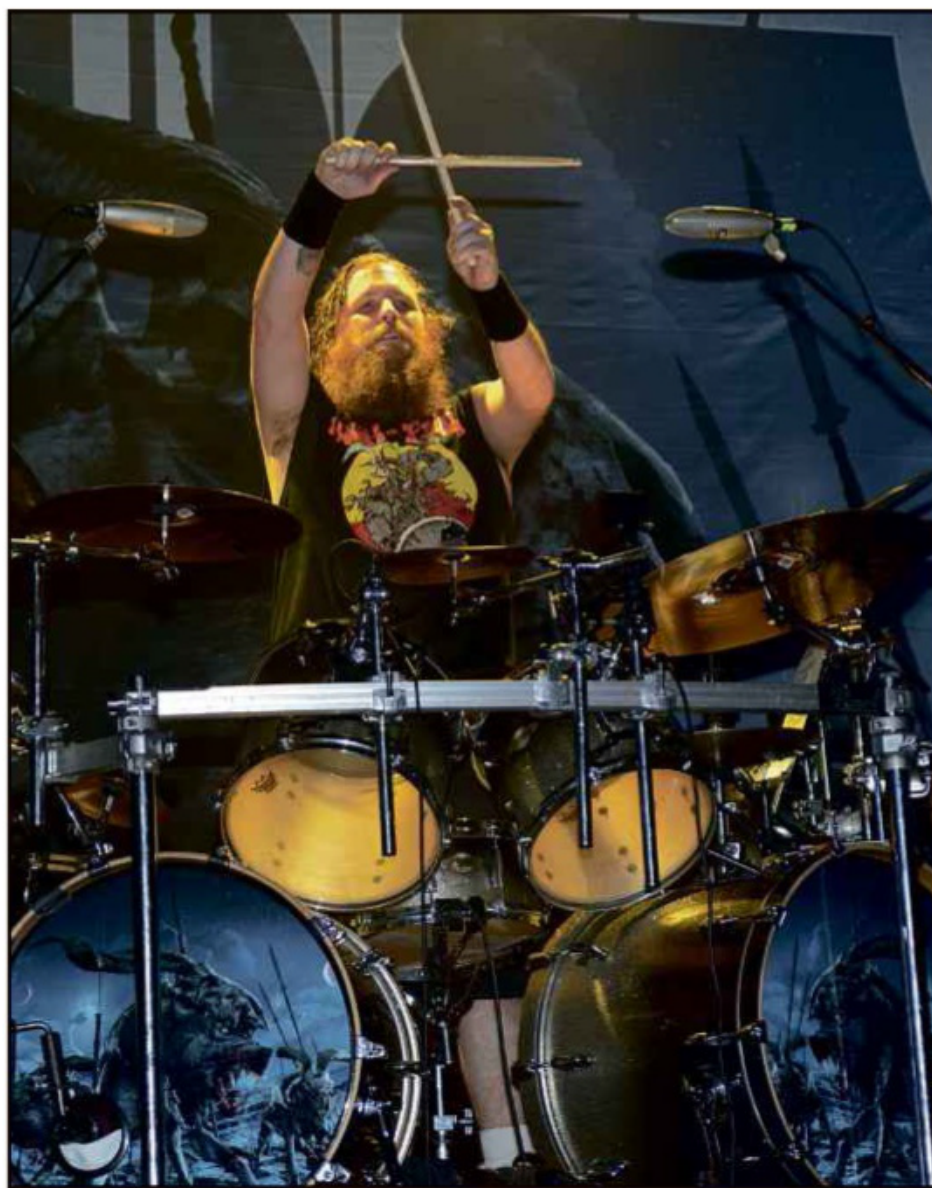
scepticism, Jani's claims attracted the interest of a team of Indian military doctors, who studied him for two weeks at a hospital in Ahmedabad in 2010. He was observed with cameras and closed-circuit television, while doctors took scans of his organs, brain and blood vessels and conducted tests on his heart, lungs and memory capacity. They insisted that during this period, he did not eat, drink or go to the toilet, his only contact with fluids being regular gargling and bathing. "We still do not know how he survives," said neurologist Sudhir Shah. "It is still a mystery what kind of phenomenon this is." The results of the study, initiated by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation, were never published or submitted for peer review. *france24.com*, 26 May 2020. See also Ted Harrison, "Not by Bread Alone", **FT304:44-49**.

ISLAMIC EXORCISM FEARS

France's equivalent to the British intelligence agency MI5, La Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure (DGSI), has expressed concern that the spread of Islamic exorcisms is fuelling radicalisation of French Muslims. The French government's anti-sect committee, The Interministerial Mission on the Struggle against the Problem of Sects, has commissioned a report on the phenomenon that denounces some practitioners of Islamic healing rituals as "charlatans".

A growing number of French Muslims are paying hundreds of euros for rituals such as *ruqyah*, intended to exorcise *djinn*. Other practitioners offer *hijama*, a cupping therapy which involves piercing the skin; a suction cup is placed over the cut to draw out the blood. According to a DGSI agent, many of these rituals amount to "the illegal practice of medicine" and may exacerbate religious divisions in the country. The agent, who spoke anonymously to *Le Parisien* newspaper, said they had uncovered several dozen centres offering exorcisms and healing therapies, as well as many individuals and training centres.

The anti-sect committee's report, written by Bilel Ainine of the National Institute for Scientific Research, argues that



ABOVE: Will Carroll, drummer in thrash metal outfit Death Angel, has reported a near-death experience in which he travelled to both Heaven and Hell and met Satan.

"I was this giant obese Jabba the Hut type creature"

some Islamic exorcisms have been used as a pretext for sexual abuse. Ainine wrote of "fraudsters" who lacked any religious training and whose exorcism and healing services were "more often than not a break from traditional Islamic rituals," and that there was a "mercantile aspect which in many cases is close to extortion." *Times*, 3 June 2020.

SATAN'S VOICE RECORDED

A Christian author claims to have recorded Satan's voice for the first time. Roderick Millington's new book *The Devil's Playground: an Investigation into the Dark Side of Electronic Voice Phenomenon* includes links to 21 audio clips so that readers can listen to alleged examples of demons threatening

and cajoling, including the first-ever recording of the voice of Satan.

Millington claims that of the numerous EVP voices he has recorded over the past 15 years, around 20 per cent have been "frightening, crude, and threatening, or to put it another way, demonic". He says his book will enable Christians of all denominations to be better prepared to recognise and prevent demonic influence or attack. "I am a journalist and have approached this whole subject with an open-minded, investigative attitude," he writes. "And I will own up straight away to the fact that until recently I was one of the cynics who laughed at those who believe in the Devil. Then I heard his voice, and everything changed."

He says he hesitated at first, fearing that further research might lead to a confrontation with "supreme evil" that could "quite literally put my mortal soul in danger." But he felt that to ignore it would be irresponsible, especially in these times when, as

he sees it, "people are meddling with things they have only ever seen in the movies or have read about in a book."

Millington argues that to surround oneself with negative words and thoughts or to listen to music that "puts Satan on a pedestal" will inevitably attract the demonic. He warns that "if you can't control yourself, then something else will," and adds "I can't underline too strongly that Satan exists, and he's busy." *meta-speech.co.uk*; *christiannewswire.com*, 28 July 2020.

DEATH ANGEL'S NDE

Will Carroll, drummer for Californian thrash metal band Death Angel, has reported experiencing a near-death (NDE) or out-of-body (OOBE) experience involving Satan after nearly dying from Covid-19.

The band was on tour when the outbreak began, and many of the musicians and crew members began feeling unwell. The last part of the tour was cancelled early and, upon returning home, Carroll began feeling seriously unwell. Bedridden for five days, the drummer woke with a very high fever and breathing difficulties. He was rushed to hospital – but has no memory of being taken there – where he was put on a ventilator while in a medically-induced coma. This was when things got weird: "I did have some out-of-body experiences. I went to Hell and Satan was a woman and I was being punished for sloth. I was this giant obese Jabba the Hut type creature. I was vomiting blood and kept on vomiting blood until I had a heart attack, which is kind of weird because I had heart failure during my coma".

Carroll remembers rising up from Hell, floating above his body and going up to Heaven; but "it was horrifying there, too. It was like a Roman orgy and the angels were scarier than the demons. I shot back down to Earth and I was with some friends in a nightclub and I didn't know why I was there. That's the last thing I remember until I woke up."

Now recovered, he says: "As far as for my personal life and my experience of what I went through, I don't think Satan's quite as cool as I used to." *happymag.tv*, 30 May 2020.

STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN scours the papers for the weirdest news stories from across Europe...



ABOVE LEFT: Pink snow on the Presena glacier in Northern Italy. ABOVE RIGHT: A makeshift sign directs visitors to the Church of the Virgin, Markopoulo, and its snakes.

GLACIER IN THE PINK

The snow of the Italian Presena glacier in Trentino province, some 2,600m (8,530ft) above sea-level, has turned pink. The novel coloration is due to the presence of single-cell algae, which, scientists have suggested, accelerate the melting of ice. “The algae are not dangerous. It is a completely natural phenomenon which often happens in spring and summer,” said Biagio Di Mauro of the Italian Research Council. Several north Italian lakes also change colour most years when certain species of algae bloom. *Spiegel online*, 6 July 2020.

MYSTERY FISH DEATHS

A mass die-off of herring in the German North Sea has puzzled experts. At the end of June, hundreds of herring were washed ashore at several places on the coast in Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony, especially at Büsum, Eiderstedt, Nordstrand, and Cuxhaven. Biologist Rainer Borchering of the Environmental Monitoring Station Wadden Sea explained that herring normally fled water temperatures of 20° to

go to deeper and colder water, but thought it possible the younger animals had come into contact with poisonous algae. Among the dead marine animals, environmentalist also counted smelts, twait shad, eels, porpoises and sturgeon. As the River Elbe, leading to the marine port of Hamburg, is currently being excavated to allow access for even bigger ships, there are fears that this interference with nature may be the cause of the deaths. *web.de*, 25 Jun 2020.

REPTILE ROUND-UP

In mid-August each year, on the feast day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, people on the Ionian island of Kefalonia in Greece celebrate the Snake Festival in the Church of the Virgin in Markopoulo on a mountain high above the southern coast. Snakes are collected for days and then brought into the church in bags or jars, where they are released in the presence of the holy icon of the Panagia Fidoussa, the Virgin of the Snakes. While today the snakes have to be collected from around the area, before the earthquake

that hit the island in 1953 the baby snakes assembled in the church of their own volition and gathered at the altar to venerate an icon of the Virgin Mary. To protect the snakes from motorists, they are now picked up before they have to cross the road to the church. The pious believe the snakes come to worship; rationalists claim the church lies on a migratory route used by the animals. This year, the festival took place on 14 August. See FT359:26 for more; and for another religious festival involving snakes, this time in Italy, see p4-5.

Spain had its own crocodile season in June. All the country’s major newspapers carried daily news updates on the 5ft (1.5m) “crocodile of Simancas”, named for the town near Valladolid where it was first seen on 5 June at the confluence of the rivers Duero and Pisuerga by a group of young people; the next morning, a city employee spotted it in the same place. Police searched the area without finding the out-of-place reptile, but on 7 June a biologist visited the area where the sightings had occurred and found a nest

and tracks which led him to suspect a Nile crocodile was on the loose. However, further police searches as well as an investigation of a 6km (four mile) stretch of the river banks by both the Natural Protection Service (SEPRONA) and the diving association GEAS found no further clues to the animal’s presence. A tracker who tried to trace it also came back empty-handed, while drones and thermal cameras yielded no results. On 8 June herpetologist Arturo Pascual declared that he didn’t believe in the animal’s existence, saying: “I am not convinced there is a crocodile. All we have are simple eyewitness reports.” Other experts suspected it was an abandoned pet, and probably quite harmless; police, on the other hand, warned that the elusive croc could be very dangerous. Daily updates informed readers that attempts were being made to lure the creature with bait, that the search radius had been enlarged to six km, that the low temperatures might have forced the crocodile into hiding, and much more besides. I stopped counting at 30 news reports, but



the last I saw was from 10 June and bore the headline “Adiós al cocodrilo de Valladolid”. The Guardia Civil finally called off the search as no trace of the alleged escapee had ever been found – but what about the tracks and nest? *lavanguardia.com*, 6+7+8+9+10 June; *ABC*, 7+8+9+10 June 2020.

And in Styria, Austria, a 38-year-old Berlin man attending a bachelor party in an alpine hut tried to prove he was courageous enough to kiss an earth worm – but what he picked up turned out to be a baby adder. He licked the venomous snake, which in turn bit the man’s tongue. His throat swelled up and he had to be taken to the Federal Hospital at Wiener Neustadt, 60km (37 miles) away, for treatment. *n-tv.de*, 6 July 2020.

IT’S RAINING CRABS

On the evening of 21 May, a woman in Bochum, Germany, called the police to report an unusual emergency: a rain of crabs. When the officers arrived, they could only confirm the woman’s report – they found about half a dozen dead crabs on the pavement, and while they quizzed the witness, two further animals plummeted from the sky. A search discovered 25 further crabs on a projecting roof. It was only then that the residents of a neighbouring house came forward to explain the strange event: they had bought crabs for dinner, put them in a box on their balcony, the crabs had somehow forced open the lid – and their attempt at a mass break-out had led them to their fall to their doom. *web.de*, 3 June 2020.

OUT OF PLACE ANIMALS

On 19 May, a forester’s dog sniffed out the severed hand of an ape in woods west of Munich. Police were called and the remains identified as those of a chimpanzee or bonobo. “It still had the skin, the fur, the finger nails, everything,” a police spokesperson said. “It had been severed just below the wrist.” At the request of



ABOVE: Video footage said to show Anatolia’s otherwise highly elusive lion.

the officers, the dog was sent into the thicket for a second time, and this time retrieved a foot. “This is a complete and utter mystery for us,” the spokesperson concluded. The hand and foot were sent for further evaluation to the Bavarian Department for Health and Food Security. There was little subsequent news; only that the remains had been preserved in formalin and could have been lying in the forest for years. I am reminded of the find made by Giorgio Bassi in September 2006, above Gravedonna at Lake Como. He was looking for mushrooms, but found the arm of an ape. *Provincia di Como*, 14+15 Sept 2006; *gmx.net*, 20 May; *netzwerk-kryptozoologie.de*, 2 June 2020.

There were more bizarre encounters in Germany. In April, a kangaroo was spotted hopping along the A7 motorway between Neumünster and Bordesholm, and in May police hunted a cheetah in Walthersdorf, Brandenburg, after a resident reported seeing one. The search was carried out with a helicopter. When the officers finally tracked a spotted felid, it proved to be a Savannah cat, a recent breed (accepted by The International Cat Association in 2012) which can grow up to 4ft (1.2m) in length and which was the culprit in a recent ABC sighting in London (FT395:9). *Holsteinischer Courier*, 24 Apr; *Berliner Morgenpost*, 21 May 2020.

TURKISH LION

Herodotus (bk 7, 124-126) says that lions mauled the camels of King Xerxes’s army in 480 BC near the river Echidorus in Thrace, and that lions still lived in a region in Greece “bounded by the river Nestus... and the River Achelous in Acarnania. Lions occur between these two rivers; but they are never seen in the region of Europe to the east of the Nestus, or on the Continent west of the Achelous.” Charles Berlitz, in his *The Lost Ship of Noah*, says that John Libi, searching for the Ark on several occasions from 1954 to 1969, was attacked by mountain lions on the slopes of Mt Ararat. And now we have a new series of sightings. In Corum province, in northern central Anatolia, the villagers of Asagi Emirhalo are convinced that a lion has killed two cattle in recent months. Some have seen the big cat and a video was taken, which shows a brown shape in the grass. Officials have deployed three photo traps and combed the area with drones, while locals have been out hunting the cat, equipped with binoculars and guns. So far, however, no lion has been confirmed in the area, let alone shot. The Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* adds that no lions have ever been seen in Anatolia, and that “the last Anatolian leopard was shot in 1974 about 200km [124 miles] from Corum in Beypazari.” *hurriyet.de*, 12 Jun 2020.

A WATERY POLT

Poltergeist cases are few and far between in Germany, at least in terms of press coverage. However, in mid-May a local paper in Passau, Bavaria, began a series of articles on strange occurrences at a farmhouse in Oberwesterbach. From December 2019, the house had been “sweating water” to such an extent that 50-year-old owner Anita Maier said: “It is raining inside.” Whenever she returned from work, she had to mop up pools of water around the house, while buckets collecting drops stood everywhere. There was water on the cooker, the kitchen dresser and the dining table. The situation was unbearable for her and her family. She called in experts, but neither mechanics nor the water board were able to explain the “water polt”. Maier suspected the phenomenon must have a natural explanation, and noted that the floods occurred only between 7am and 7pm, when both she and her 13-year-old son Martin were away from the house. After two reports on the case appeared in the local paper, and journalist Karin Seidl had witnessed the phenomenon herself, several people came forward to help the Maiers: ghost hunters, a water diviner, a priest, a female healer and several conventional water companies all tried to solve the puzzle, but none was able to help. Then, towards the end of June, the strange phenomenon seemed to end of its own accord as the water flows suddenly stopped. On 28 June the paper carried the story that “for the last few weeks” there had been no more “deluges” in the house. While Mrs Maier had been having to deal with up to 170 litres of water a day, the house was now mostly dry, with just a small puddle here and there. “Actually, I still do not know what to believe,” she said, “but I would have preferred some kind of explanation. *Passauer Neue Presse*, 14+15+23 May, 28+29 June 2020.



NECROLOG

This month, we file a final report on a tenacious investigative journalist whose work frequently took him into the shadowlands of political conspiracy...



ABOVE LEFT: Roger Courtiour (left) and Barrie Penrose (right) in Minehead in 1976 for the Jeremy Thorpe hearing. ABOVE RIGHT: Hack/spook Gordon Winter.

BARRIE PENROSE

The British investigative journalist and author Barrie Penrose died in July 2020 aged 78 following complications due to Parkinson's disease. He is best known for his investigation of the Jeremy Thorpe scandal in the 1970s and for outing John Cairncross as the Cambridge spy ring's 'Fifth Man'.

Born in Croydon, Penrose studied at the London School of Economics at the same time as Mick Jagger. Beginning his journalistic career at the *International Herald Tribune's* Paris office, he began working for the BBC in 1970, where he began to make a name for himself as a persistent and determined freelance reporter.

In May 1976 he was contacted by Harold Wilson who, weeks earlier, had resigned as Prime Minister. Wilson, who regarded Penrose as outside the Establishment and therefore trustworthy, revealed his suspicions that 10 Downing Street had been bugged by right-wing elements within MI5, that CIA agents had infiltrated the Cabinet Office, and that senior civil servants, military chiefs and business leaders had planned two coups (one in 1968 and another in the early 1970s) that

would have replaced him with Lord Mountbatten as interim PM.

Wilson also told Penrose that Jeremy Thorpe, then leader of the Liberal Party and a vocal opponent of apartheid, was being smeared by BOSS, South Africa's intelligence agency. At the time there were widespread allegations that Thorpe had conspired to have his former lover Norman Scott murdered by airline pilot Andrew Newton, whose bungled attempt resulted in Scott's Great Dane Rinka being shot dead one rainy night on a lonely Dartmoor road.

Penrose and his associate Roger Courtiour met with Wilson on numerous occasions, giving rise to *Private Eye's* portmanteau nickname 'Pencourt' (echoing the 'Woodstein' of Watergate fame). The duo's subsequent book *The Pencourt File* (Secker & Warburg, 1978) recalled Wilson's occasionally bizarre statements: "I see myself as the big fat spider in the corner of the room," the former PM told them. "Sometimes I speak when I am asleep. You should both listen. Occasionally when we meet I might tell you to go to the Charing Cross Road and kick a blind man

standing on the corner. That blind man may tell you something, lead you somewhere."

Wilson's fears that British intelligence was working against him have been dismissed as paranoia, but in his best-seller *Spycatcher* (1987), former MI5 officer Peter Wright described a plot to force Wilson's resignation, hatched by a faction within 'Five' who were convinced the PM was a Communist spy. Similarly, Wilson's suspicions of South African interference in British politics were not without substance; reporter and South African Intelligence (BOSS) agent Gordon Winter had been the first journalist to obtain written proof of Scott and Thorpe's affair in the form of love letters retained by Scott.

Penrose fought a long and decidedly ugly duel with Gordon Winter in the shadowlands of conspiracy. Winter always privately suggested that in 1976, Harold Wilson's people had telephoned the *wrong* Penrose – there was indeed a John Penrose at the *Daily Mirror* who had also been covering the Thorpe story. John Penrose (who later married Anne Robinson of *The Weakest Link* fame) was

certainly a more high-profile journalist than Barrie. In 1997, Barrie Penrose contributed a rather sinister feature to the *Sunday Times* pointing out that Gordon Winter was now living in England and was "wanted" by the police "for a string of unsolved crimes" and as the man who had framed Peter Hain (prominent as an anti-apartheid activist in the 1970s, later framed by BOSS for a bank robbery). Winter, thought to be residing in the Dorchester area, complained to the Press Complaints Commission but with little recourse.

A *Newsnight* report based on Pencourt's Thorpe findings was pulled by BBC management, apparently for lack of proof. Sir Charles Curran, then BBC Director-General, declined to renew their contracts, later saying he had done so because Pencourt had failed, against his wishes, to pursue the South African angle, instead focusing on Thorpe's involvement with Scott.

In effect, Penrose, in conjunction with BBC producer and author Gordon Carr, had been responsible for quashing the South African aspect of the story. Pencourt's focus on Thorpe and the evidence they



uncovered led to Thorpe and three associates being charged with conspiracy to murder. The four men were tried and acquitted at the Old Bailey in May 1979; the judge's controversial summing-up was famously parodied by comedian Peter Cook.

After leaving the BBC, Penrose began working for the *Sunday Times*, where he became a key member (and later co-editor) of Insight, the paper's investigative team. In December 1979 he revealed John Cairncross as the previously-unknown Fifth Man of the 1930s Cambridge spy ring, having tracked Cairncross down to his home near Rome where he admitted to having passed diplomatic and political material to Guy Burgess.

One of his more important and potentially dangerous *Sunday Times* investigations uncovered links between the Provisional IRA and organised crime. He was unsuccessfully sued for libel on two occasions by Thomas 'Slab' Murphy, a farmer alleged by Penrose and colleagues to be a senior Provisional IRA officer. Murphy was believed to have planned the 1979 Warrenpoint ambush that killed 18 British soldiers, as well as being implicated in Lord Mountbatten's assassination the same day. In the 1980s he was allegedly involved in large-scale IRA smuggling operations, importing weapons from Libya. Penrose's *Sunday Times* report that led to the libel actions had accused Murphy of masterminding an IRA bombing campaign in England.

Barrie Penrose will be remembered for his tenacious and dogged pursuit of a scoop. Co-author Simon Freeman recalled his "habit of popping up on a Saturday morning with material for a ripping front-page exclusive," in contrast to the "aristocracy of wordsmiths at the *Sunday Times*... [who] spent their days... waiting to be given a story."

Barrie Penrose, investigative journalist, born Croydon, 26 Jan 1942; died 5 July 2020, aged 78.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

WHEN EAGLES ATTACK

Mum is in her vegetable plot and baby is playing in his pram. There is a glint of sun, a rage of wings and an eagle plummets down and takes the child in its claws. Before the mother can react, the eagle has struggled into the air with her son and is heading towards its eyrie.

There are a handful of early modern accounts of babies being flown off by eagles; there are a couple score tales from the 19th century; and there is a more modest number from the 20th century, including an incredible memory out of interwar Edinburgh involving an escaped zoo eagle! Best sourced of the later experiences, though, is Svanhild Hartvigsen from rural Norway (see obit, **FT272:24-25** and Jan Bondeson, "A Child Carried Off by an Eagle, **FT346:38-43**).

In 1932, as a child of three, Svanhild disappeared. She was found by searchers some seven hours later below an eagle's eyrie 2km (1.2 miles) away up a steep scree slope. No one saw Svanhild in the air, but her clothes had been torn at by claws, and later in life she tearfully remembered the bird attacking her – though she had no memory of the flight.

The problem here is not with zoology – eagles have been known to attack humans and particularly kids – but with physics. Even the bigger northern European eagles, if we

think of eagle-child yarns from Scotland and Scandinavia, are rarely heavier than six or seven kilos (13-15.4lb). A rule of thumb is that they can carry about half their body weight. The only eagle-baby stories that are credible are, then, those very few involving underweight newborns. Let's say that Svanhild was three – she was closer to four, but anyway

– she would have weighed 10-12kg (22-26.4lb). Let's say that the eagle was her weight – the equivalent of an 8ft- (2.4m) tall man. The eagle in question might have attacked Svanhild. It might have held her down and pecked her eyes out. It might, just possibly, have lifted her up half a foot or so in the death struggle. [1] However, a 10kg eagle would have had to have been double the size to have flown with Svanhild.

So what happened? Perhaps a three-year-old went alone up a dangerous scree slope and was attacked there by an eagle? Her memories included an eagle attack and being under the eyrie. I can't believe the eagle story, but I don't really believe my explanation either.

[1] Ornithologists have described to me birds of prey trying to get an overheavy animal off the ground and lifting their prey and then dropping it; is this what lies behind, say, the famous avian abduction of Marlon Lowe in Illinois in 1977 (**FT24:10, 30:49, 105:38**)? Being lifted and dropped is not flying, but it might feel like flying.

SVANHILD
WAS FOUND BY
SEARCHERS
SOME SEVEN
HOURS LATER
BELOW AN
EAGLE'S EYRIE



Much merriment in the swamp

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

PROVOCATIONS

Aaaaaaah, President Donald Trump. There is so much one could say, but we don't do politics I'm told. But let us not say Mr Trump lacks a sense of humour. It must be a close-run thing whether more bad jokes have been told about Trump than he has emitted himself, but this was surely an actual witticism:

Lou Dobbs: A lot of my friends are very concerned about what the federal government is doing when it comes to UFOs. Are you going to commit more resources to exploring UFOs and opening the documents to the public?

Donald Trump: Well, I think you're the – probably in this country – you're the UFO expert, so I'm going to be totally guided by the great Lou Dobbs. And I will tell you that I'll do whatever you ask me to do, including total transparency.

This exchange took place on a Fox Business show at the beginning of August. Lou Dobbs is of course best-known for his many books, blogs, documentaries, lectures and podcasts on UFOs over several decades. Or rather, not. He's an economics graduate and has commented on business affairs for years on CNN and latterly for Fox, and has had a fairly colourful career embracing sundry conspiracy theories, which we shall pass over in silence. But of UFOs, not a peep. Mr Trump also counts him among his friends, and knows this perfectly well. From his other comments on UFOs, such as "It's interesting," we may gather Mr Trump does not really give a toss about UFOs, which is probably the most sensible stance for a President of the United States. But at least let's not deny him the chance to put a twinkle in his eye when asked about them.

Rather dafter was fellow-billionaire Elon Musk's tweet of 31 July: "Aliens built the pyramids obv." This Olympian pronouncement seems to have come out of the blue, and Musk is renowned for eccentric tweets – but 84,000-plus people thought it was worth re-tweeting, perhaps on the grounds that a man who knows about batteries knows something the rest of us don't about other mysterious 'energies'. The Egyptians were not amused. As Auntie Beeb reported: "Egypt's Minister of International Co-operation Rania al-Mashat responded on Twitter, saying she followed and admired Mr Musk's work. But she urged him to further explore evidence about the building of the structures built for pharaohs of Egypt." And: "Egyptian archaeologist Zahi Hawass also responded in a short video in Arabic, posted on social media, saying Mr Musk's



ABOVE LEFT: Lou Dobbs: "UFO expert". ABOVE RIGHT: Jan Harzan: another nail in MUFON's coffin.

argument was a 'complete hallucination'. 'I found the tombs of the pyramids' builders that tell everyone that the builders of the pyramids are Egyptians and they were not slaves.'

Would that the Egyptians would give such a hammering to the legion of cable-TV loons who promote nasty racist crap about ancient astronauts.

CAUGHT WITH HIS FLARES DOWN?

Dr Stephen Greer likes to take bands of eager followers on week-long UFO-hunting expeditions. For up to \$3,500 a head, participants get some kind of training in some kind of meditation, which is supposed to call UFOs to your presence. On 27 January 2015, at Vero Beach, Florida, the technique apparently worked, and video of two UFOs appearing one after another and then fading from sight may be viewed on Greer's YouTube channel and his website, where he claims: "There were NO boats or ships seen anywhere in the area of the objects and there were no jets or planes or other airborne objects anywhere near the objects before, during or after the event."

Tom Rogan of the *Washington Examiner* begs to differ. He established that "a Beech 76 Duchess registered N110SU was recorded flying at 85 mph off Vero Beach. This is slower than the aircraft's normal cruising speed and would feasibly allow the aircrew to deploy parachute flares or some other illumination device. The aircraft took off and returned to the airport in Fort Pierce." Interestingly, Greer instructed his group to turn off their night scopes – which would, of course, have detected a small aircraft in the area. The Beech 76's owners said they never dropped flares. For the full sad story, see www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/

did-steven-greer-fake-a-ufo-with-flares, and, er, make up your own mind.

SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

Dr Kevin Randle reported: "Jan Harzan, the Executive Director of the Mutual UFO Network, was arrested by Huntington Beach, California, police on 3 July on charges of soliciting sexual activity with a 13-year-old girl." Which was doubly unfortunate, as the recipient of Harzan's blandishments was not underage but undercover – a female police officer. The powers at MUFON promptly fired Harzan, though he had yet to be convicted of anything, and appointed one David MacDonald to take his place. This move was what someone described as 'tone deaf' for, apart from being a member of MUFON's 'Inner Circle', whatever that may be, MacDonald happens to run a company (or did) that will (or would) fly you and your co-passenger of choice to well over 5,280ft (1,609m) altitude so that the pair (or maybe a whole gang) of you can fornicate your way into the Mile-High Club. Such exquisite taste, eh? On which point I confess a certain prurient curiosity to know the internal appointments of this aircraft (though I wouldn't go so far as to look them up). This double-barrelled PR disaster comes warm on the heels of previous recent MUFON scandals involving its senior members' varieties of racism and bigotry. Not good for an organisation that once had 5,000 members, but now has but a fraction of that. While you're looking up Kevin Randle's full and measured report on this (<https://kevinrandle.blogspot.com/2020/07/jan-harzan-and-decline-of-mufon.html>), you might want to look at his post of 8 August, 'Stan Friedman vs. Philip Klass'. Albeit posthumously, Stan may now add the title Monstrous Hypocrite to his long list of accomplishments, I'd say.



Cosmic rock

JENNY RANGLES marks the 35th anniversary of Live Aid with a tale of Glasgow rockers and UFOs...

Most readers of a certain age will recall the global phenomenon that was Live Aid, a huge fundraising concert event aiming to ease hunger and poverty in poorer nations. Looking back from our current, live music-starved vantage point, it seems hard to believe that 35 years ago, in the summer of 1985, major stars played at mega-concerts that were screened live to the whole planet at a time when technology was only just making that possible. On 13 July, concerts from London and Philadelphia were watched by 40 per cent of the world's population: 1.9 billion people. In 2018, Live Aid became the focus of the Oscar-winning movie *Bohemian Rhapsody*, the remarkable story of Freddie Mercury and Queen, whose performance that day forms the climax of this successful biopic. (I could tell you about a synchronistic link between that Queen song and my own family, but that's another story!)

Live Aid was an astonishing success, even if it didn't change the world. It certainly proved memorable in the career of an up-and-coming band from Glasgow – and UFOs were very much at the heart of the story.

It all started in the early hours of that Saturday in 1985 as the world prepared to party along with Queen. The band had met in the north of the city, at the home of their bass player. It was a lovely, warm summer's night, approaching 1am on Live Aid day. They had called for a taxi and, while waiting for it to arrive, went into the garden for fresh air, leaving one band member asleep inside.

The core of the group was, and still is, the McMullans – a father and son, Brian Snr and Brian Jnr. It was the two Brians and a third band member who had gone out to enjoy the night sky. At 12.56, Brian Snr looked up and saw an amber ball moving. He immediately knew it was unusual. Through binoculars, it seemed large and Brian kept saying, "I don't believe this" as he passed the binoculars to his son. By now, the object was 'skipping' across the sky, seeming to spring forward in small 'leaps' as it headed low over Glasgow's outer suburbs.

Brian Snr described it as resembling a red-hot poker and noted that it took 25 seconds to slowly cross the sky. As it moved, the colour changed. Another band member likened what he saw to hot glass being blown. The unlucky sleeping member of the group was awoken mid-sighting, and forever regretted missing all but its tail end. Brian Jnr exclaimed: "Oh my God! It's shaped like a flying saucer!" The witnesses



estimated the object was about 60ft (18m) across as it vanished towards Fenwick Moor.

After this episode the band felt as if they were in a 'daze' and recalled how time had seemed to stop during the incident. (Hearing the story from the band was one of the early clues I picked up while developing my ideas about the 'Oz Factor' state witnesses often report.) They still recall the shock they felt – as if they were brought back to reality – when someone's watch alarm went off. It was set at 1.01 and they were surprised that only five minutes had elapsed during the sighting. Another witness described how this odd sensation felt – as if they had been "paralysed with awe".

I should emphasise the band had some interest in UFOs, and had even been to famed 1960s UFO hot spot Warminster and written songs about it. Even so, they made a point of seeking out an astronomer at an observatory to discuss their sighting. After hearing their story, he consulted colleagues and then advised the band they had probably just observed "smoke from a rocket". (I did check for rocket launches or re-entries, but unsuccessfully.)

The band's name is C.E.IV – derived from the UFO classification system developed by Dr J Allen Hynek. Though he stopped his system at CE3 – a Close Encounter of the Third Kind, made famous by the Spielberg movie – I know from discussions with Allen that he was open to adding a 'fourth kind' of encounter where you do not just see 'aliens' but experience deeper contact.

Since 1985, the term 'CE4' has been adopted by the UFO community, and this Glasgow band helped cement the idea, producing a series of albums rooted in UFO lore and writing original songs that tell the story of ufology, all stemming from

knowledge of the phenomenon and – as we have seen – direct experience. They went on to have other experiences – including one band member meeting what appeared to be a Man in Black as he sat in his car in Argyle Street, Glasgow, when it was packed with Christmas shoppers in 1991.

The band's albums span the decades from *Abduction*, a 1988 musical adventure story of what a CE4 incident might feel like, to *Visions* in 1992, containing UFO-related songs written in their early years. In the 21st century, they have made appearances at UFO hot spots and conventions, writing tracks about celebrated UFO incidents from Roswell and Warminster to the Bonnybridge encounters in Scotland.

However, it was the 1995 album *One Dream* that really set out what C.E.IV are about. That album was launched by the band at a big international UFO conference, 10 years on from Live Aid, direct to the UFO community. This was the same event in Sheffield where footage of the famous 'Roswell Autopsy film' made its public debut (see **FT395:32-40**).

If you haven't come across C.E.IV's music and you have an interest in UFOs, then this is the perfect time, as they are currently celebrating the 25th anniversary of that Sheffield event with a newly mastered release of *One Dream*.

Brian senior explains how modern technology has allowed them to update and add new layers impossible a quarter of a century ago; now you can hear the songs in the way that they always were intended to sound in a pre-Internet age when *The X-Files* was first enthralling the world. One track is a preview of a new concept album the band is currently working on – *Gabriel's View*, due for a 2021 release – which tells the story, from an alien perspective, of the ET plan to leave 'markers' and help educate humanity.

This underrated group produce thoughtful melodic rock that offers a fresh take on the forteen nature of the UFO phenomenon; and, by working with local UFO researchers across the decades, they helped put Scottish ufology on the map. Perhaps, in the future, their recordings will help people to understand why these events captured the attention of millions in the second half of the 20th century. After all, the lyrics of C.E.IV songs are the soundtrack to the lives of many now reading this magazine!

You can find out more about the band, listen to samples of their work and purchase their music at: www.ceiv.co.uk.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

.....
FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

79 THE TERRIBLE GRINNING MEN

THEO PAIJMANS finds that John Keel's Indrid Cold is not the only smiling weirdo we should be worried about...

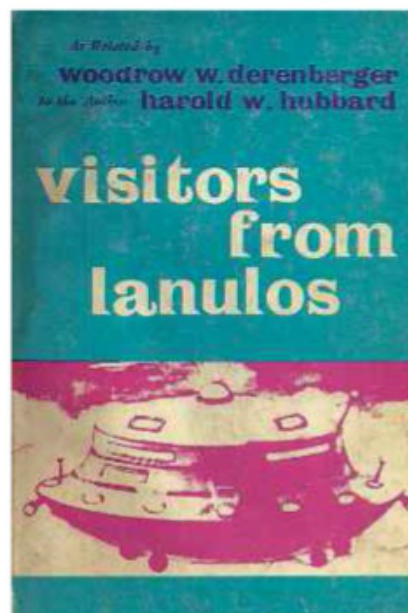


ABOVE: An illustration showing Woodrow Derenberger's strange encounter on Interstate 77. **BELOW:** Derenberger retold the story – which proved to be just the start of a series of adventures in high strangeness – in his 1971 contactee memoir *Visitors from Lanulos*.

One of the iconic figures of *Alice in Wonderland* is the Cheshire cat, known for its mischievous grin and the gradual dimming of its body from time to time so that only the grin remains. Lewis Carroll popularised the cat, but while its origins can be traced to the 18th century, they ultimately remain obscure (see FT387:58-59 for Rob Gandy's theory). Over a century after the publication of Carroll's classic tale, an American man went down the rabbit hole to meet his own grinning creature.

For Woodrow Derenberger the evening of 2 November 1966 should have been as uneventful as any of the previous evenings in his life. It was about half past seven and Derenberger, a salesman and father of two young children, was driving home on Interstate 77 from Marietta, Ohio, to Parkersburg, West Virginia. As he approached

the West Virginia 47 interchange, a large grey metallic object shaped like an old kerosene lamp with a flat bottom and a domed top suddenly appeared next to his car. It carried no lights and it made a "fluttering, soft noise", Derenberger told a reporter two days after the incident. "It moved along eight to 10 inches above the pavement, blocked the highway and finally stopped," he recalled. A door in the side of the object opened and a man stepped out. The man strolled to Derenberger's car in a leisurely manner, while the object climbed to about 50-75ft (15-23m) over the highway and remained there. The man introduced himself as Indrid Cold and, after a short nonsensical chat, all the while hiding his hands crosswise under his armpits, he said goodbye. The object descended once more, a door opened, and an arm reached



out to help the man back onboard. "The door closed, sounding much like a car door," Derenberger said. The object then flew into the air at tremendous speed.¹

Over the years, Derenberger's encounter became quite famous. Not just because of the weird name with which the man introduced himself, or the

telepathic chat, or the strange jacket he wore, that was "blue and quite shiny, having a glistening effect". Instead, the incident is often remembered because of the striking facial expression the ufonaut wore throughout the conversation: all the while that he communicated telepathically, his face bore a fixed grin.

Just three weeks before Derenberger's weird encounter, two 16-year-old boys had a frightening experience in Elizabeth, New Jersey. It was around 10.30 on the night of 10 October 1966. James Yanchitis and Martin Munov were heading towards a local shop for a game of pinball. As they passed the corner of a street, James told his friend that there was someone behind them. They turned around and saw a man standing behind a high wire fence closing off the Jersey Turnpike. The turnpike was elevated at 30ft (9m) above

street level. How the man got there was a mystery, as the fence was 8ft (2.4m) high and the embankment rising up to the turnpike was steep. "He was too big to be a human," James told John Keel, who investigated the case and interviewed the two boys three days after the incident. They described the man as having a dark complexion and thought he must have been at least 7ft (2m) tall. "From the reflection of the street light it looked like he had on an auto mechanic's work suit, sort of green and glittery. It looked like he had a bald head and his eyes were imbedded in his head... I didn't see any nose but he had a very big mouth." The man had been staring intently at a house across the street, but when the boys stopped to look at him he slowly turned his head. "And when he grinned his mouth was real big and full of white teeth. He gave us a nasty grin," James added.²

Keel labelled the two incidents 'grinning man'. There are a few corresponding details: the grinning giant wore a glittering overall, and the smiling ufonaut a glittering jacket. The ufonaut hid his hands crosswise under his armpits; the grinning giant was standing in weeds so that his feet weren't visible. The encounters have a ghostlike quality, like those partly materialised entities we read about in Spiritualist reports, and as we plunge deeper into the 19th century newspapers and parapsychological literature, we find other stories of harrowing encounters with grinning entities.

There was the grinning ghost for instance, in a haunted house on Lexington Avenue, New York. 14-year-old Florence Whitting saw it one winter's day. It was half past four in the afternoon and she had just left her room on the third floor when she saw someone in the shadows down the hallway. It was a short and deformed man: "As he walked toward me he appeared to be half crouching. His arms were bundled up under a long black cape, which he wore, as if he carried something and when I first saw him the cape hid half of his face. He came on toward me and I looked full in his face. It was ghastly pale, like the face of a dead person... His eyes were very large and



"He was dressed in black... His eyes were bright and he had a large mouth, with very large white teeth, which I saw plainly when he grinned at me."



dark... I shrieked and rushed downstairs." Emily Ward, Whitting's maid, had seen the ghost on two occasions. "It was about two o'clock in the morning. I got up, lighted the gas, turning it low, and looked out of the window... When I turned around to leave the window I saw a man standing by the foot of my bed.... He was not an old man and he was dressed in black... His eyes were big and bright and he had a large mouth, with

very large white teeth, which I saw plainly when he grinned at me. When I turned and saw him he was standing in a crouched position looking over the bed at me. I had made a few steps toward the bed before I had time to catch myself, and then I was frightened and gave a cry and said: 'Who are you?'

"When I said that, he grinned and showed his teeth. He stood there a moment chuckling at me and then

LEFT: Woodrow Derenberger's daughter Taunia Derenberger-Bowman holds up a photograph of her father.

BELOW LEFT: Derenberger giving an interview about in 1966.

he slowly backed over to he narrow passageway leading to the rear room. He kept his eyes fixed on me all the time as he backed across the room, and disappeared in the passageway."³

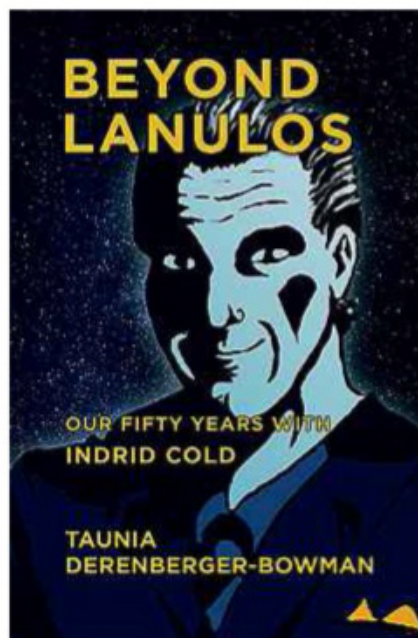
And then there was the unpleasant house that was built of 'jinxed materials' in Parkville, New York. Some of the timbers came from another demolished house that had been the scene of many murders. Something was not right, and many believed it was because of 'the memory of its timbers'. When the Reisner family moved in, things took a turn for the worse. After two nights, their 18-year-old son woke up to see a ball of fire in his bedroom that disappeared after a short while. The next night he saw a ring of fire in his room. When he woke up a few nights later he saw someone in his room with a "very dark complexion" and wearing a dark jacket. "The figure danced around the room and grinned and gloated over the terrified boy until the latter screamed out in terror..." The Reisners promptly left the house: "The house is now vacant, except as to balls of fire and mysterious figures which the neighbours declare can be seen there nightly."⁴

But one of the most surreal encounters with grinning men is found in the annals of the Society of Psychical Research. The venerable society called it "quite unique in our collection" and it was even mentioned in the 19th century Spiritualist classic *Phantasms of the Living*.⁵ The two women involved composed the account of their bizarre encounter, which had taken place in Oxford in 1870. One night in November the two sisters, one 16, the other 20, had been to evening service in their village church. There was a thick fog, and "the Moon was full, but it made a sort of steam in the fog, instead of shining brightly". Suddenly a smallish man appeared on the road next to them to disappear without making a sound, but then something very strange happened: "In another moment we were all bewildered at the sight



LEFT: Perhaps the most iconic image of a 'grinning man' is that of Conrad Veidt in Paul Leni's 1928 silent film *The Man Who Laughs*. **BELOW:** A relatively benign-looking Indrid Cold adorns the cover of a 2016 book by Taunia Derenberger-Bowman.

around us; it was as if we were in a crowded street; innumerable figures were around us; men, women, children, and dogs, all were moving briskly about, some singly, others in groups, all without a sound; they appeared mist-like... as we walked on they came from every quarter." Apart from the dwarf-like figures dressed in 'bygone fashion,' at different moments they saw two men, they said, who "had sparks all round their faces; they appeared to grin... the two figures who had the sparks appeared to me thin and cadaverous, for the faces did not look *round*, but seemed to fall in under the cheek bones... As to the number of sparks I cannot speak definitively; they were placed at regular distances round the face; there might be about 10 or 12 round each face, so I think. They appeared yellow and bright, and they made a slight *steam* in the fog. Their light was not nearly so beautiful as a star's light... it might be more like



a small yellow candle's flame. There was nothing beautiful about them."

The entourage, including the grinning spark-faces, accompanied the startled sisters for about 200 yards, only to disappear when they reached their house. The group also had included a very tall man, the sisters explained, "who took great strides, though perfectly noiseless; he wore a kind of cape..." By the time

they had reached the gate all the figures had disappeared, except the giant man. "He had quite a different look to any of the others, looked more horrible altogether. His way of walking was quite different to the rest, and he was, I should think, twice as tall or more than any of the others... To our intense relief he passed our gate."⁶

It seems that the grinning men target age groups indiscriminately, as an experience told by a 59-year-old female teacher in the late 1980s makes clear: "As a small child I was terrified by a man dressed as Felix the Cat. He had a cat suit topped by a grinning head, that I can still see bobbing up and down. I think I was about three at the time. Later that night I awoke to see Felix standing in my doorway. He did not go away when I closed my eyes and opened them again. He stayed there grinning for what must have been several minutes. I waited until he crept

downstairs and then ran into my parents' room. As I grew up I rationalised it by telling myself he must have been a burglar. I was over 30 before it dawned on me that he hadn't *actually been there* in the doorway, that it was all just a product of my imagination. I *know* I was awake at the time – but he was there and I can still see him."⁷

Perhaps experiences such as these can best be explained as the result of hallucinations, and this was suggested in the pages of publications from the Society for Psychical Research. But what makes the experiences so unsettling is that in the animal kingdom to bare one's teeth is an act of offence or defence, signifying anger or fear. Only humans are able to bare their teeth in a different context, for instance when offering a friendly greeting or welcoming gesture. And our species is even able to simulate these emotions with a smile.

But if you were to stumble upon a grinning giant in a shiny costume in a forlorn part of town or a deserted stretch of road at night, how many of us would stay to find out if the grin was genuine and what it meant?

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6 Mrs H Sidgwick, "Notes on The Evidence, Collected by The Society, For Phantasms of the Dead", *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. III, 1885, pp.76-79. Also in *The Salt Lake Herald*, UT, 8 Nov 1897.

7 DJ West, "A Pilot Census of Hallucinations", *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. 57, April, 1990, p.176.

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 **RIDGEBACK**

ATOM AGE ALIEN?

SOLVING THE THE RISLEY SILVER MAN MYSTERY

GLEN VAUDREY reopens the file on one of the most baffling close encounters of the 1970s, when a witness reported seeing a seven-foot-tall 'silver man' walking through a fence at a secret British nuclear reactor site – but was this an alien invasion or something else?

The case of the Risley Silver Man is one of those forgotten classics of the 1970s that deserves another look. I say “forgotten”, although Jenny Randles wrote about the episode in these pages in 2013 (FT305:29), describing it as “one of the strangest” encounters that she and her colleague Peter Hough had ever investigated. They considered a wide range of explanations, but could not find one that “fully accounts for some of the riddles surrounding the ‘Man on the Moss’”. I revisited the story in 2018 and, with a little bit of luck, managed to get to the bottom of the mystery.

THE ENCOUNTER

It was about 11.30pm on 17 March 1978 when 39-year-old service engineer Ken Edwards was driving back from a union meeting in Sale, Greater Manchester, to his home in Fearnhead. His journey had been a quiet one, at least until he got within a couple of miles of home.

His route took him along the largely empty edge of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) site at Risley. Travelling along a service road called Daten Avenue (its name came from ‘Department of ATomic ENergy’), he was approaching the roundabout near the Universities Research Reactor building and the UKAEA site fire station when he encountered something very strange – a large silver man.

It’s not hard to imagine Ken’s shock as he saw a 7ft (2m) tall silver figure coming down the steep embankment to his left, from the side of the road where the nuclear reactor was located. Stopping his van, Ken watched as the figure descended the slope in a most peculiar way. He would later recall that it moved with a very stiff-legged gait; so unnatural a gait, in fact, that it gave the impression the figure lacked any knees.

Ken sat frozen in his vehicle as the ‘Silver Man’ continued to walk towards and then across the road, coming within 15ft (4.6m) of him. When it passed in front of him, the Silver Man looked in his direction and two beams of light shot from the creature’s eyes



To Ken’s amazement, the figure raised an arm and walked through the fence

and dazzled him. After a moment, the Silver Man continued his walk towards the security fence that surrounded the UKAEA site. To Ken’s amazement, the figure raised an arm, walked through the 10ft (3m) tall, barbed wire-topped, chain-link security fence and disappeared into the darkness. There was no hole in the fence: the Silver Man appeared simply to have passed through it.

A shocked Ken continued on his way home, where he drank a large whisky and told his wife: “I’ve seen a silver man”. Upon reflection, he thought that there might actually be a security issue, and so his wife drove him to nearby Padgate police station

LEFT: Witness Ken Edwards, whose strange encounter took place on 17 March 1978.

to report the sighting. The police then contacted the UKAEA nuclear constabulary.

Ken accompanied a police officer to Daten Avenue, where they found a group of 25 serious-looking UKAEA constabulary officers gathered at the spot where the encounter had occurred. Despite hearing Ken’s story, they refused to investigate the overgrown site where the Silver Man had emerged. Also, a check of the fence showed that it had not been damaged in any way. Ken headed home.

It might all have ended there but for the *Warrington Guardian* publishing the details on its front page the following week:

“Risley Monster Terrifies Driver”

Who or what was the monster, 7ft tall clad in a silver coloured suit with two beams of light emitting from the eyes which confronted a Warrington service engineer after midnight on Friday?

According to the report, a police spokesman had said “We have interviewed Mr Edwards and have no reason to discount his story”. And that, essentially, is the story as it stood in April 1978.

INITIAL INVESTIGATIONS

It didn’t take long for the UFO community to be drawn to the case, as Jenny described. Ken helpfully drew a map showing the scene of his sighting, placing the Silver Man near the fire station and the nuclear reactor. Investigations began to add more details: for example, the shape of the Silver Man started to evolve, with its arms coming out of its chest like those of a T-Rex (amusingly referred to by some as “nipple arms”). Ken also recounted that when the creature looked at him it felt as though two heavy hands were pushing him down into his car seat.

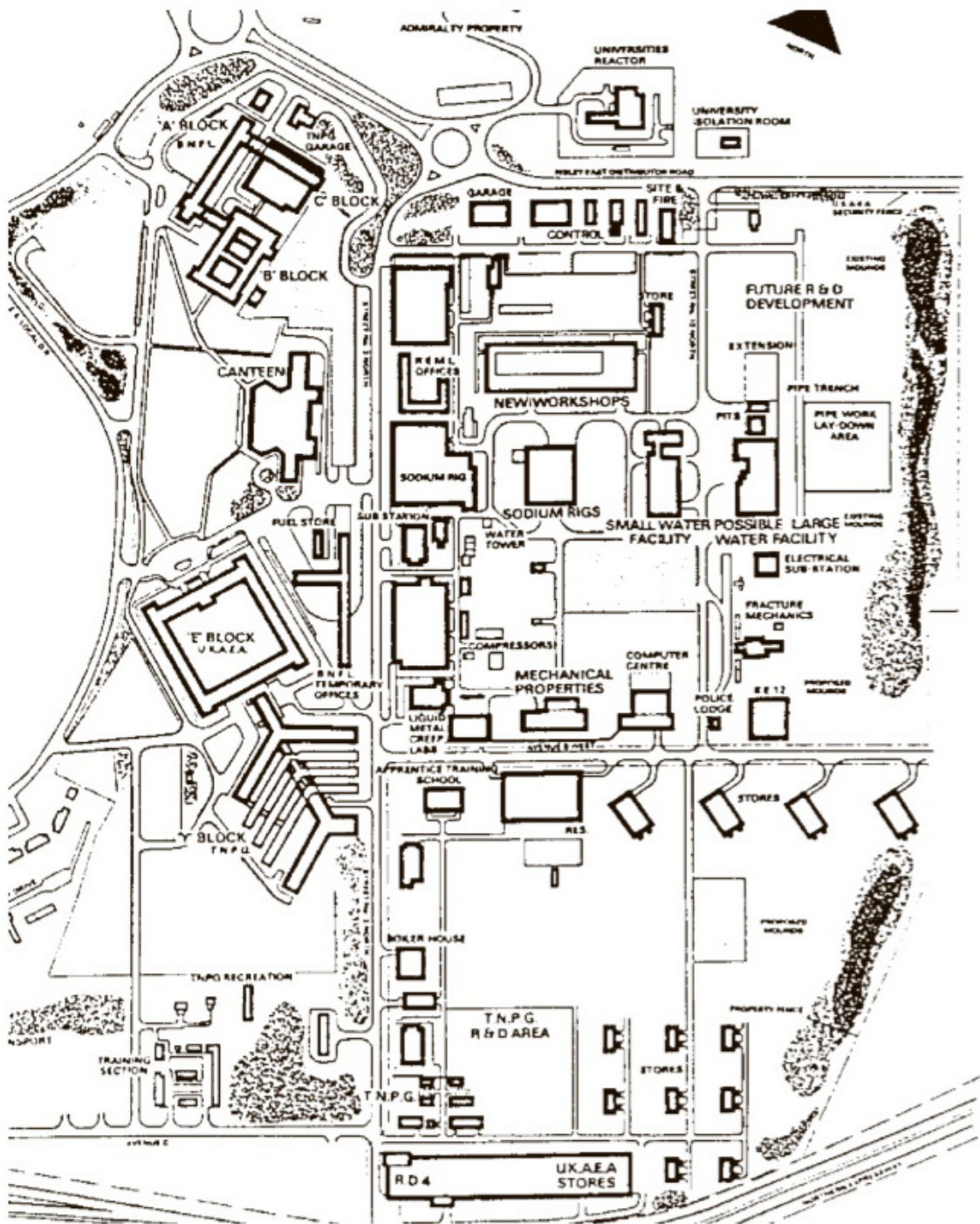
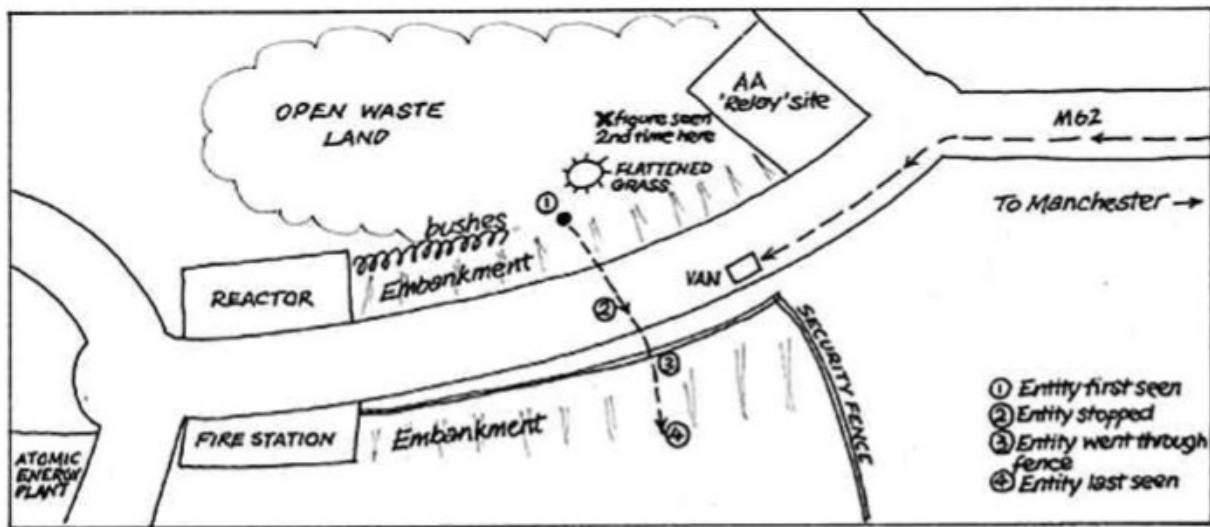
There were two main theories at the time. The first was local college students had been pulling a prank. Police *did* investigate this



12

RADIATION MONITORING
CRT A





TOP: A map based on Ken Edwards's encounter, with the fire station placed nearer the Daten Avenue roundabout than it really was. ABOVE: A 1974 staff orientation map of the UKAEA site showing the true location of the various buildings. BELOW: Extremely rare photos of the interior and exterior of the Universities Research Reactor building, taken from an article in the October 1964 issue of *Electronics and Power*.



idea, but found no evidence: there was no rag week or similar activity taking place at the time. Indeed, it would be hard to believe that a group of students would hang around an empty quarter of Risley just to appear in front of a lone driver and then manage the tricky feat of appearing to walk through a 10ft-high fence.

The second theory was that Ken simply saw a fireman in a silver fire suit. The police and local UKAEA staff tested this by arranging for a fireman to be present on site as Ken drove past again – but he said it was nothing like what he had seen. And while firemen can do many remarkable things, walking through a chain-link fence isn't one of them.

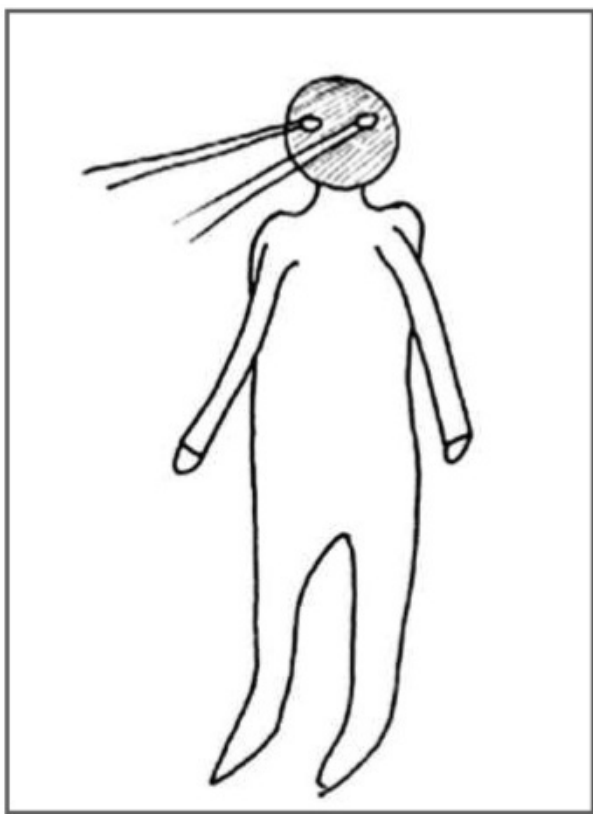
Some investigators suggested that radiation suits might have been stored in the Universities Reactor building and that these might somehow have been involved; but, again, the wearer of such a suit would not be able to walk through a chain-link fence without leaving a trace. Another university building at the site, known as the Isolation Unit, became a subject of interest, as it was believed to have hosted some kind of sensory deprivation experiments. This led to suggestions that very vivid and mystical hallucinations had somehow conjured up a tulpa-like entity that had escaped the participants' minds and walked across the road.

From this point, the story largely disappeared, partly because Ken died from cancer in 1982 at the age of 42. Rare recent references include a 2011 online account, Jenny's brief 2013 article, and an interesting Internet radio show from 2015.

GETTING INVOLVED

The story would probably have been forgotten, or only occasionally appeared in books of UFO encounters, had it not been for a chance conversation at *Weird Weekend North 2018* (see report FT367:22). Some members of LAPIS (the Lancashire Anomalous Phenomena Investigation Society: www.lapisparanormal.com) mentioned that they had been to Risley, looking for the fire station as part of their investigation into the Risley Silver Man. They had spent a whole afternoon searching for its location but were unable to find any trace of it. As luck would have it, I was at that time working on the business park built on the old site of Risley UKAEA. Although I had previously been unaware of the Silver Man story, one of the first things I had been told when starting work there was the history of the site and the location of the fire station. I decided to try to find out more.

A quick Internet search for the Risley Silver Man provided a wealth of new theories to add to – or cloud – the original reports, offering plenty of ideas for what was behind the sighting. What had started as a simple report of a large Silver Man had over the years been transformed into something completely different.



MARTIN BOND / SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

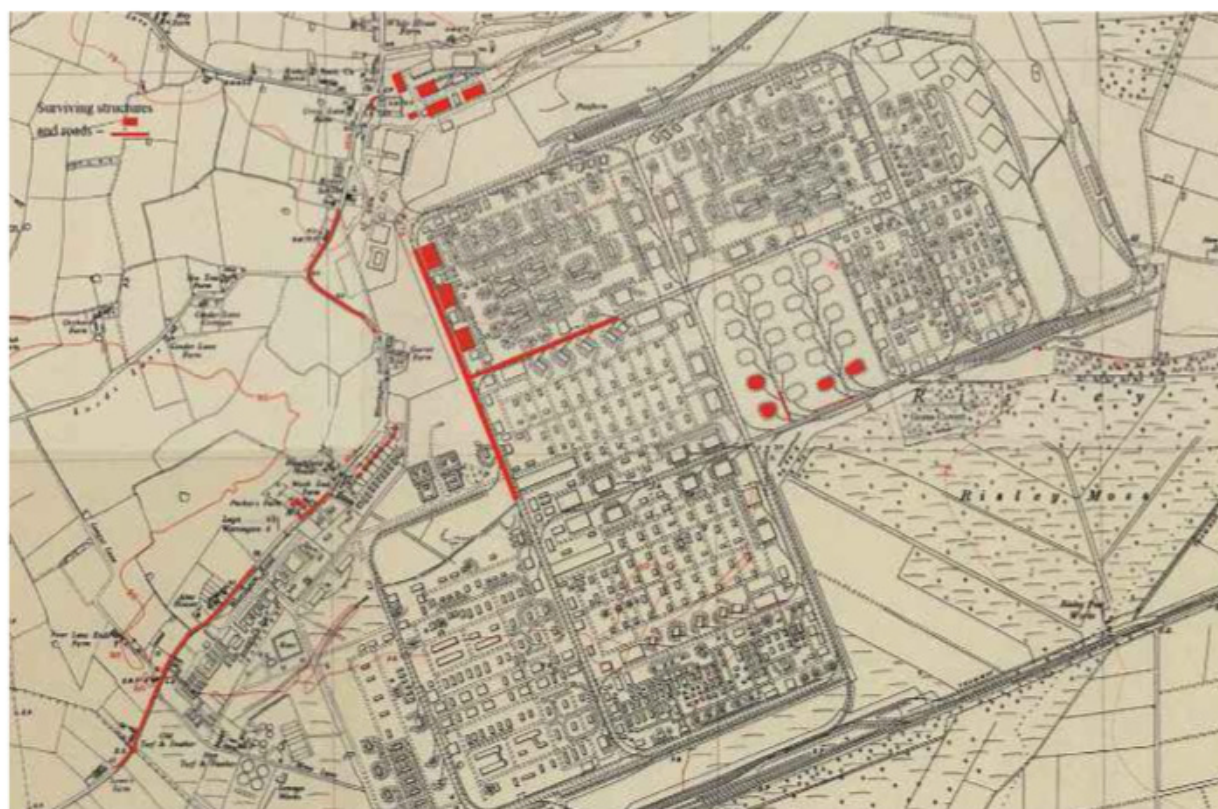
ABOVE LEFT: A drawing of the Silver Man based on Ken Edwards's witness sketch. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A 'Danger Radiation' sign behind the chain-link fence keeping unwanted visitors away from the UKAEA site. **BELOW:** A 1947 map showing the extensive Ordnance filling factory site, now occupied by the town of Birchwood.

Was the culprit some sort of extraterrestrial life form? It certainly looked odd, and it clearly was not native to Risley. Did its strange, stiff movements suggest that it had come from a world with different gravity... and a lack of knees? But that wouldn't explain how it could walk through the fence; had it employed alien technology to do so?

Was it a ghost? This theory seems to stem from people trying to answer the question of how it could pass through the fence. But where would this ghost have come from? Suggestions included old graveyards disturbed by the construction of the M62 motorway, and even the idea that it was the ghost of some occupant of a crashed alien ship. Was it some kind of inter-dimensional traveller? Had some experiment in either the isolation unit or the depths of the UKAEA opened a portal that allowed the Silver Man to appear and disappear as he reached the fence?

Where to start? I began by looking at the physical evidence. In this case, the best starting point was the location of the sighting. Today, all signs of the UKAEA buildings have long since gone, but one key bit of evidence to hand was the map produced by Ken Edwards. However, since the map had been drawn, every single building marked on it had been demolished. But not everything had disappeared: Daten Avenue still existed.

Finding the exact location was also hindered by the lack of photos of the UKAEA site; being a secret location, little photographic evidence remains. Even the local business park had only found around six photos, all showing groups of students in front of nameless buildings. It's hard to believe these days, when every phone has a camera, that any location covering 136 acres was not photographed.



Did its movements suggest it had come from a world with different gravity?

I did manage to find a few aerial shots from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, and from one of these it was possible to locate the Universities Reactor. Earlier maps also helped, with one from 1947 showing the old Ordnance filling factory site. This revealed that what is now the town of Birchwood was then nothing more than a large area of bunkers and filling buildings; most are now demolished, although a few can still be found

today. It also highlighted the size of the wasteland that Ken would have travelled through, and showed a few buildings that could be matched to his map. The Ordnance Survey map from 1974 shows a large blank location for the secret UKAEA site, which might as well have 'here be dragons' written on it. Between this and the derelict former Ordnance filling factory there wasn't much to see.

Given the secrecy, the lack of photos and 40 years of redevelopment, it might be thought that finding the exact locations involved in the Silver Man case would prove impossible, but that wasn't the case. Unexpectedly, I found a staff orientation map for the UKAEA site dated 1974. While the place was shrouded in secrecy, someone had taken home this site map – a seemingly careless security breach that came in handy with my research. With the orientation map,



ABOVE LEFT: The remains of the UKAEA fire station. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The corner of the fence line at Daten Avenue, with one of the few surviving sections of the original fence. The area has since been redeveloped, destroying most of the locations of interest. **BELOW:** The *Warrington Guardian* newspaper report from 1974.

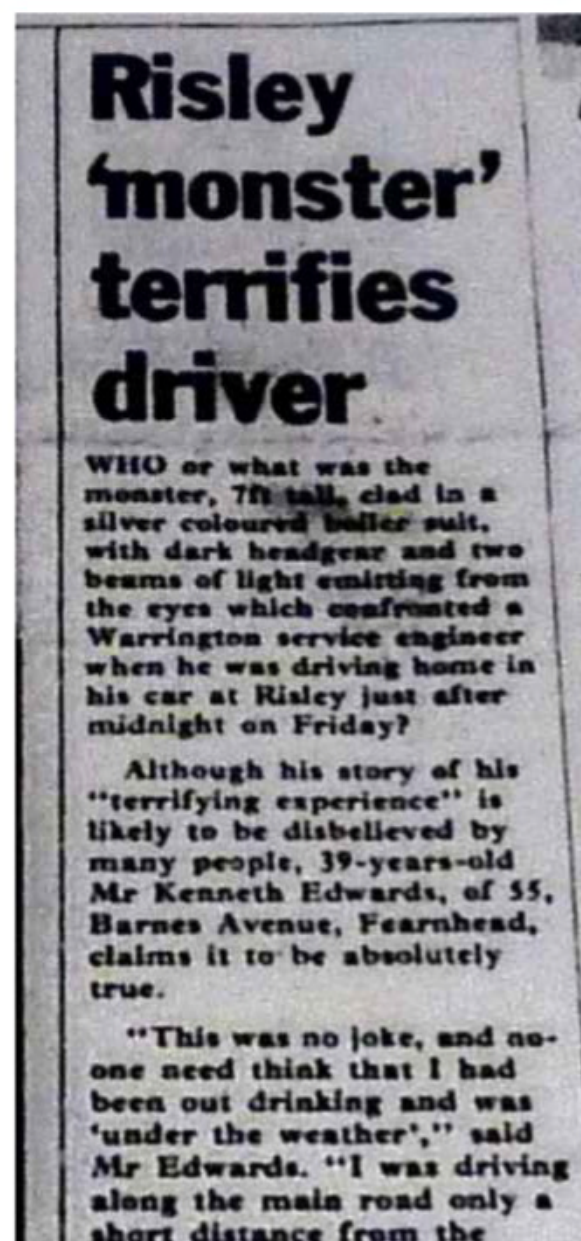
it was easy enough to overlay Ken's map and the site map and match up the buildings, including the Universities Reactor. It also proved straightforward enough to find people who remembered seeing the building in use, and others who had seen it being demolished in the early 2000s (today the site is occupied by an office block). With advice from a former fireman who had worked at the UKAEA site from 1988, I was able to find the location of the fire station. Surprisingly, it wasn't in the same place as on Ken's map but a quarter of a mile further down the road, opposite not the reactor but the Universities Isolation Building.

A visit to this site revealed that some of the security fence still existed at the edge of the business park, one corner actually matching up with the fence shown on Ken's map (as this area is due to be developed it's hard to say how much longer this fence will be around). The fence, still topped with barbed wire, was closer to 8ft (2.4m) in height than the 10ft (3m) described by Ken; but it was possible to see, even 40 years after the event, that the chain-link fence was not of a kind that you could simply walk through. Hardly a trace of the fire station remains: a bit of tarmac and a few mounds in the grass. Without the map and the help of the former fireman, it would be hard to establish that it ever existed. Of the former isolation unit, nothing remains; there is just a car park and a few steps heading up from a lay-by on Daten Avenue towards a security fence.

EXPLANATIONS

Returning to the local library, I found the original newspaper report about the Silver Man. It wasn't particularly sensational, neither was it the only odd item in the paper. It seems the *Warrington Guardian* was rather keen on UFO stories, with a major

In the 1970s, UFO reports appeared frequently in the newspaper's pages



feature appearing the same week as the report of Ken's encounter. A trawl through further issues published that year showed that UFO reports appeared frequently in the newspaper's pages, but it was interesting that *at no point* was the Silver Man referred to as coming from a UFO.

I had the location mapped out, and with the help of my informant (the former fireman, who wishes to remain anonymous) I could start to piece together what really happened on that night in 1974.

Back in the 1970s, it was well known that if you ever got too close to the UKAEA fence-line, the site police would quickly move you along. Interestingly, it was assumed that the fence the Silver Man had walked through must have led to a secure area – in reality, it only led to an area between the outer and inner security fences. Work on the site related to the building of nuclear reactors; part of the inner site was mocked-up to replicate the cooling systems of nuclear reactors. One used liquid metallic sodium, a substance that if it caught fire would burn at a very high temperature. Consequently, the site fire-fighters had been issued with high-temperature silver-coloured fire suits.

The fire station was at the edge of the site alongside Daten Avenue, close enough for the crews to spray water over the fire station building on to the road to mimic rain. This prank would confound passing travellers with very localised showers. But that wasn't the only prank they pulled. On the night of 17 March, or perhaps the very early hours of the 18th, the bored fire staff had an idea to enliven the dull night.

With no supervising officer on duty, the White Watch (not as spooky as it sounds; the rotating shifts were colour-coded) thought they would scare the students in the isolation building just across the road.



ABOVE LEFT: The spot where the Silver Man crossed Daten Avenue, looking from inside the former UKAEA towards the embankment from which the figure descended. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Another strange 'Silver Man' appears in the famous 1963 'Solway Spaceman' photo; see **FT196:29, 286:28-9, 305:28**.

The students, it turns out, were not being used in some sort of exotic remote viewing experiments but were simply getting paid to take part in research into circadian rhythms. They were housed in a self-contained flat with all the usual facilities, but with no contact with the outside world, other than in emergencies. So it was that 'Big John' a 6ft 5in (almost 2m) fireman put on his high temperature fire suit over his regular uniform. This restricted his movements, making walking quite difficult and causing a robotic gait. He went through the access road gate, across the empty Daten Avenue and up the embankment to the isolation building – but, try as he might, he couldn't get any reaction from the students within the building. Disappointed, he started to make his way back down the embankment and towards the fire station. As chance would have it, this was when Ken Edwards was travelling home in his van. No doubt just as startled as Ken, John stopped in the middle of the road, illuminated in the van's headlights. After a few seconds, he started off again on his way back to the fire station, seemingly walking through the high-security fence.

This is the one enduring mystery that has put paid to every previous theory: how did the Silver Man walk through the fence?

Well, he simply did what anyone would have done and went through the slightly opened gate by the fire station. The fire station was considerably further along the road than where it appeared on Ken's map. Heading behind the fire station building, out of sight, John would have been able to quickly remove his fire suit and look entirely innocent by the time Ken and the police arrived. But what about the "two beams of light [that] shot from the creature's eyes"? Well, the specialist nature of the visor on the high temperature fire

suit was such that it reflected light in a similar way to a ballroom glitter ball – so it simply reflected back the car's headlights as beams of light.

If we look at the story afresh with this new information we now see a completely different event to the one that has been remembered and retold. We start with a man coming back from a union meeting on St Patrick's Day. I don't know about you, but every union meeting I've been to has been well stocked with alcohol. Certainly, the policeman who took his report described Ken as being as "pissed as a newt", while a fireman witness also said that Ken was the worse for drink. So we have Ken driving home, slightly the worse for wear, when he comes across a prank in progress; because the joke wasn't aimed at him, he is completely clueless as to what's going on. It's a poorly lit area and the silver fire suit reflects a lot of light, especially when caught in the van headlights. Perhaps it's the shock, the poor lighting, or too much wobbly water, but Ken fails to register that there is a gate in the fence. By the time he gets home and has a few more drinks, you have all the confusion required to produce a classic close encounter.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In light of the above, it's possible to see how Jenny Randles and Peter Hough were unable to come to any firm conclusions – they were misdirected (i.e. lied to). Ironically, Jenny's *FT* article *does* actually refer to the three key elements: a possible hoax, a suited fireman and the isolation unit. However, Jenny and Peter were led away from the true connection: there *was* a hoax taking place, but it was not aimed at Ken; instead, it was a silver-suited fireman playing a prank on the students in the isolation unit.

What should not be ignored is the serious trouble 'Big John' and his colleagues would have found themselves in if the truth had come out. There would have been disciplinary proceedings, possibly followed by sackings, and the associated publicity would probably have led to a formal inquiry given the sensitive nature of the site and the need for total security. So when it was arranged for a fireman to be seen on site as Ken drove past you might anticipate that the fireman would not be wearing exactly the same specialist suit that 'Big John' had, and would not be wearing it over his regular uniform; and he was probably the shortest fireman from White Watch!

Therefore, when approaches were made by external (UFO) investigators, the firemen and the UKAEA nuclear constabulary would have 'closed ranks'. UFO investigators' interest in the story would also help the firemen and relevant security staff more easily deflect enquiries from the local authorities, who would then happily dismiss the event.

The advantage I had was to be working at the business park, and to have the good fortune to come across certain documents. I will have been seen as an 'insider' by my former fireman source; and as the event happened 40 years ago, there would be no comeback for the people involved if the truth were finally told. All of which makes me wonder how many other close encounter cases would survive a similar fresh approach...

✦ GLEN VAUDREY is an award-winning artist and sculptor and the author of *Mystery Animals of the British Isles: The Western Isles* (CFZ, 2009), *Mystery Animals of the British Isles: The Northern Isles* (CFZ, 2011), and *Sea Serpent Carcasses: Scotland – From the Stronsa Monster to Loch Ness* (CFZ, 2012).

THE WEIRD WORLD OF CHARLES WATERTON

SUSAN MARSH tells the story of eccentric explorer and naturalist Charles Waterton, whose curious career embraced both a pioneering concern with conservation and a strange obsession with creating hybrid creatures through his own unique form of taxidermy.

Towards the end of his life, and, indeed, throughout most of it, Charles Waterton (1782–1865) was a terrifically strange man. Eschewing the high society that he was born into in favour of the company of birds and beasts, he was more often found dangling from a tree with a heron's nest in his hands than fingering the silverware at a refined dinner party. One of the wildest and weirdest footnotes in British aristocratic history, he is mostly remembered by forteans for his distinctive taxidermy: part chimera, part political commentary, part Lovecraftian nightmare fuel. But the stories that have emerged surrounding Waterton over the years are perhaps even more fascinating and bizarre.

A boy barely out of his teens, fleeing a deadly sickness dubbed the Black Vomit on a rogue merchant ship slipping out of a quarantined city. A young man in Rome, scaling the 450-ft (137m) dome of St Peter's Basilica for little more than a friendly bet.¹ A determined Englishman in his late 30s, baffling the natives of British Guyana by wrestling a caiman with his bare hands. An elderly man holed up away from the world, prone to unlikely feats of acrobatics and a rather unsettling habit of biting his guests' legs while pretending to be a dog. Somewhat improbably, Charles Waterton was all of these things and many more.

ADVENTURES AND WANDERINGS

Born just before the Industrial Revolution began to tear a destructive path through the hills and dales of northern England, the wayward aristocrat spent his youth enjoying the abundant wildlife of Walton Hall, the Watertons' family estate just outside Wakefield. When he was sent away to school at the age of nine, he repeatedly evaded the attempts of his teachers to educate him in a traditional manner in favour of a life among the wild creatures that inhabited the countryside. Dismissed and disciplined for his strange behaviour, he eventually found solace and encouragement at Stonyhurst, a Jesuit college in the neighbouring county of Lancashire.



He had the habit of biting guests' legs while pretending to be a dog

Even in these early years, Waterton's life was tinged by the macabre. When a visiting animal was thought to have contracted rabies, his mother arranged for the family dog to be hanged in a gruesome ritualistic act of protection. Later, at Stonyhurst, he was chosen to assist in the electrocution of an ox, an experiment designed to demonstrate the power of the emerging technology of electricity.² Rather than instilling a disregard for animal life in the young Waterton, these experiences seem to have had quite the opposite effect.

At Stonyhurst, his love of natural history was allowed to flourish, and by the time that he left school at 18 he was keen to get out and explore the world. Sent to stay with two uncles who had fled the persecution of Catholics in Britain and settled in Spain,

LEFT: The Nondescript; frontispiece to Waterton's "Wanderings in South America" (1825). **RIGHT:** Charles Waterton painted at the age of 41, by American artist Charles Wilson Peale, 1824.

the young man had his first taste of the adventure that he would continue to pursue throughout his life. However, that trip was cut tragically short when the Black Vomit descended on Malaga, decimating the population and turning much of the city into an open grave. At just 22 years old, Waterton contracted and almost died from the grisly disease, the first of many brushes with mortality that he would experience throughout his life. Eventually, he defied quarantine and slipped out of the stricken city, fleeing back through the Straits of Gibraltar towards home.

While such an experience might have nipped another man's sense of adventure in the bud, the horrors that Waterton witnessed in Malaga did little to deter him; two years later, he was on his way to Demerara, in what was then British Guiana, to manage an estate that his father had bought. First colonised by the Dutch in the 17th century, the region had been under British control for the past eight years, shipping slaves from Africa to work on the sugarcane plantations. Although Waterton's role in this dehumanising trade should not go uncriticised, it is worth noting that he himself described the situation as "a traffic that should have been stifled at birth."³ At times, he went against the prevailing notion that the slaves and the indigenous Guyanese were somehow inferior to the white colonialists, seizing the opportunity to learn what both groups could teach him about life and survival in a tropical climate; later, these skills would almost certainly save his life on a number of occasions. But there is no denying that Waterton's story is irrevocably intertwined with that of the plantations.⁴

During these early years in British Guiana, he inhabited a world of stark contrasts. In the colonial port of Georgetown, a slice of British society had





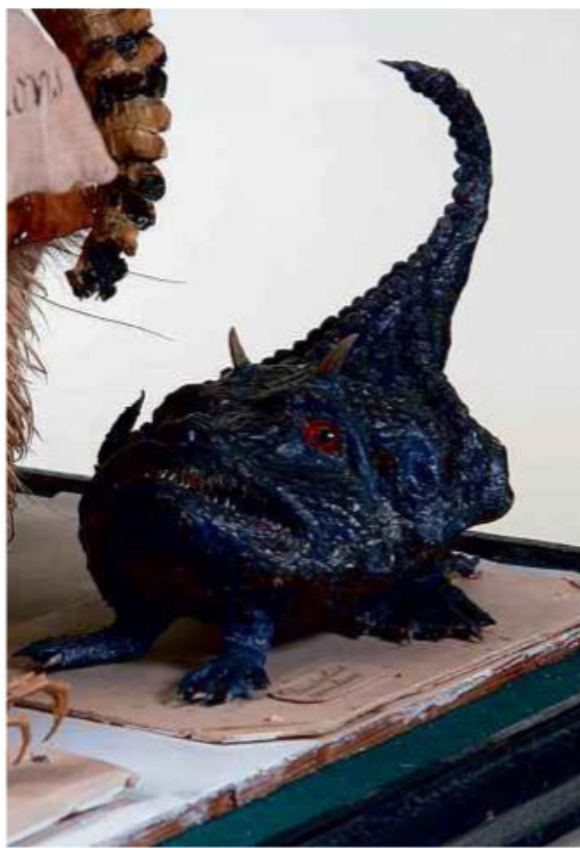
ABOVE: One of the colourful episodes in Waterton's life – his capturing of a caiman by jumping on its back – in an etching by Robert Cruikshank, 1827.

BELOW: This strange crocodilian horror from "John Bull and the National Debt" is in fact a tiny caiman with cockerel spurs added.

been incongruously transplanted onto the northern coast of South America, a spectacle which the young Englishman found distasteful at best. But just behind the town and plantations was the wild interior, inhabited by nomadic tribes and bands of escaped slaves who had decided that the uncharted forests offered hope for a better life. And, as always, Waterton took every opportunity to leave civilisation behind and find solace in a simpler life.

Over the course of the next two decades, he would make three separate journeys, which he affectionately dubbed wanderings, to South America, as well as one to the United States. Giving up estate management and embarking on his first adventure in 1812, he became one of the first white men to venture beyond the colonial settlements and into the untamed reaches of British Guiana. Despite the uncomfortable conditions, dangerous wildlife and ever-present threat of sickness and disease, he thrived in this new environment, committing himself to cataloguing and documenting all aspects of this strange and foreign world. Specifically, he developed a fascination with curare, the mysterious poison that the indigenous population was known to deploy using blowpipes to devastating effect.

Hoping to learn more about the substance, which was little understood by the Western world, Waterton conducted a number of grisly experiments on



Waterton jumped nimbly onto the caiman's back to secure his prize

animals, administering the poison and watching as the creatures succumbed to its deadly effects. For a man who would go on to become one of the first ever conservationists, dedicated to protecting and preserving wild animals in their natural habitat, it was perhaps an unlikely activity to engage in. But this is just one example of the strange duality that would come to define Waterton and his career.

By the time that he embarked on his second journey in 1816, his purpose had become more concrete. In a letter to the Pope, he explained his intentions of studying the indigenous population of the neighbouring country of Brazil, learning more about curare and searching for Lake Parima – the purported location of the mythical city of El Dorado. Like many explorers who would come after him, he never did track down the City of Gold, but his other experiences in the wilds of South America only left him hungering after more adventure.⁵

In 1820, he embarked on a third journey to South America, and this time his objective had changed once more. Rather than wandering from place to place, he intended to spend all of his time in British Guiana, immersing himself in the great diversity of wildlife that inhabited these foreign climes. He also planned to master the art of taxidermy, with the aim of bringing some choice specimens back to Walton Hall.

BIZARRE CREATIONS

However, just as in his wanderings, Waterton was not content to merely mimic the efforts of those who had gone before. Up until this point, much of the wildlife on display in British museums had been preserved in a rather amateurish fashion, prepared by taxidermists who had never actually seen the animals that they were trying to recreate. Waterton developed his own method of preservation, soaking his specimens in mercury and moulding them from the inside out. Ultimately, this process resulted in a collection of surprisingly lifelike creatures, hollow rather than stuffed, many of which can still be seen today in Wakefield Museum.⁶

Over the course of his wanderings, and throughout his later years back at Walton Hall, Waterton prepared and preserved a great number of specimens, some of which made invaluable contributions to the field of natural history at the time. One particularly noteworthy example was the caiman that he captured in British Guiana during his third journey. Determined to kill the creature without the use of weapons which might blemish its hide, and thus taint it as a zoological specimen, he enlisted the help of a number of natives in an elaborate scheme. Eventually, after much wrangling, the group wrestled the caiman out of the water – at which point Waterton jumped nimbly on its back to secure his prize. Wasting no time, he began dissecting the creature right there in the forest, creating an admirable piece of work that remains perfectly preserved even today.

For a man obsessed with recreating nature in its most lifelike form, however, Waterton also used his skills to forge some startling and downright bizarre creations. For fortians, this is probably the most interesting part of his legacy. For reasons that remain somewhat obscure, the talented taxidermist dedicated untold hours to building a number of fantastical creatures and tableaux, some of which have survived into the 21st century more or less intact. In one piece, dubbed “The Nondescript”, a distinctly human face is seemingly moulded from the countenance of a monkey, its glazed eyes and button nose conjuring an unmistakable air of disapproval. In another, improbably titled “John Bull and the National Debt”,⁷ a porcupine’s spines burst from underneath a turtle shell, framing another human-like expression. Surrounding this monstrosity are six miniscule devils, including an angler-fish wearing a coat of snakeskin, a fish seamlessly attached to the lower half of a toad and a tiny caiman dressed up with cockerel spurs.

When I first stumbled across this strange collection, I was a student in Wakefield, passing a rainy day in a jungle-like room at the local museum. As I peered into the cabinets, the exhibits continued to grow ever more bizarre. From one, another unsettling man-monkey looked back, its head decked with horns and its arms crossed in a defiant



ABOVE: Waterton's piece of satirical taxidermy, “John Bull and the National Debt” features not just the bizarre porcupine-turtle John Bull but six devils constructed from various creatures.

COURTESY OF WAKEFIELD MUSEUM



stance. I learned later that this one was named “Martin Luther After His Fall” – a dig at the Protestant reformer on behalf of the staunchly Catholic Waterton. From another case, the bastard lovechild of an eagle owl and a bittern, dubbed “The Noctifer”, glared back at me with beady eyes, its feathers ruffled, in what was apparently a scathing comment on the Reformation. And all the while, beneath my feet, Waterton’s caiman lurked menacingly, its teeth set in a sinister and predatory grin.

An amateur cryptozoologist from an early age, my interest was instantly piqued. What exactly were these creations, lurking in an obscure northern museum? Clearly, they were not, as their creator himself sometimes claimed, genuine flesh-and-blood monsters from a foreign land. Waterton’s work felt then, as it does today, like a strange new departure for the practice of taxidermy. Somewhere between zooform phenomena and legendary sea monsters, at the juncture of rogue Tasmanian tigers and cultural icons like the wendigo and chupacabra, might there be a space for creations like the Nondescript and the Noctifer? Certainly, they were not real animals – but if they were not real, then what were they?

Later in life, I understood better that some of the world’s strangest taxidermy chimeras – the monkey sewed onto the fish, the rabbit with antelope horns – were designed simply to befuddle and delight; they had no mysterious origin, just their own special place in the annals of the bizarre. But looking at Waterton and his life, it is difficult to place his creations in the same category. Certainly, he was no showman, and he seems to have made little attempt to display his creations to anyone but a select few. So why would this man, who was so committed to preserving natural, untouched specimens that he opted to leap onto the back of a wild caiman rather than sully it with a gunshot wound, choose to devote his impressive talents to creating such a bizarre menagerie of freaks? The answer eluded me then – and to an extent it does still.

THE NONDESCRIPT

Probably the best-known example of Waterton’s strange hobby is “The Nondescript”, the human-like bust that was created, according to records, from either the head or the hindquarters of a red howler monkey. But in *Wanderings in South America*, the account of his adventures that was published in 1825, Waterton offered a very different backstory for the strange beast.

Towards the end of his fourth wandering, after completing a tour of North America and the Antilles, Waterton returned to British Guiana, where he continued to observe the local fauna. It was during this journey, he claimed, that he was able to procure a specimen of a particularly unusual beast: an animal that appeared to be somewhere between a monkey and a man.



TOP AND ABOVE: The Nondescript is probably Waterton’s best-known creation; it was reputedly created from bits of a howler monkey, but Waterton offered a quite different origin for it in his *Wanderings*.

According to a piece in the local Georgetown newspaper, Waterton had heard rumours of an indigenous tribe that inhabited the treetops deep within the forest, and despite warnings that they were a “cruel and malicious race,” he set out to discover their territory. Following the lead of a local man, he was able to locate the spot these mysterious tree-dwellers called home, where giant nests could be seen suspended from the trees. But when the guide spotted smoke pouring from this vertiginous settlement, Waterton explained, the man fled in fear, leaving the explorer in the forest alone.

“Just as he left me I heard a rustling in one of the high tufted trees near me. I instantly took aim with my air gun, and down dropped the animal, lifeless at my feet. Here for the first time I saw the real wild man of the woods. I looked at him again and again, and was sorry I had ever gone in quest of him.”

Unable to carry such a large specimen out of the forest alone, the story goes, Waterton took a knife to the beast, hefting its head and shoulders onto his back and making a swift exit. “I strongly suspected I had unfortunately killed a man,” he later confessed. “Nor have I yet made up my mind upon the subject.”⁸

Waterton quickly preserved the upper portion of the beast and took it to Georgetown, where it was briefly placed on display. And largely, it seems, the residents of the colonial outpost took The Nondescript as an entertaining joke. But later, in *Wanderings in South America*, Waterton removed the fanciful narrative surrounding his capture of the creature, presenting it as simply a specimen that he had procured:

“In my opinion, his thick coat of hair, and great length of tail, put his species out of all question; but then, his face and head cause the inspector to pause for a moment, before he ventures to pronounce his opinion of the classification... The features of this animal are quite of the Grecian cast; and he has a placidity of countenance which shows that things went well with him when in life.”

Later, Waterton went on to claim that some observers, on viewing The Nondescript, had questioned whether or not such a thing could have been artificially created – “whether it be possible that the brute features of the monkey can be changed into the noble countenance of man.”⁹ Was The Nondescript, then, simply its creator’s joke at their expense, an opportunity for him to watch in amused silence as others debated the possibilities of a metamorphosis that he had already achieved?

If Waterton’s goal was to prove his skill as a taxidermist by hoodwinking others into believing that The Nondescript was real, then he seems mostly to have failed. Certainly, the creature has never made its way into the cryptozoological records in the same way as, say, the Loys Ape, another



ABOVE LEFT: The Noctifer – not a real bird but “the bastard lovechild of an eagle owl and a bittern”. The label describes it as “The spirit of the dark ages, unknown in England before the Reformation.”

“I instantly took aim, and down dropped the animal, lifeless at my feet

unnervingly human-like simian allegedly captured in the wild (see FT70:34, 90:42, 107:48, 134:21). In fact, there seems to be little evidence to suggest that anyone of importance was ever taken in by the charade. Instead, many of Waterton’s peers spoke out against his decision to include an illustration of the creature in his writings, dismissing him as little more than a

fantasist. And for the rest of his career, he would struggle to shake off this reputation.

Despite the derision of other naturalists, however, Waterton never took the logical step of proclaiming The Nondescript an out-and-out fake. And while this decision must have baffled and frustrated his supporters, there is another interesting side note which might explain why the explorer was so reluctant to publicise his motivations.

Some years previously, a tax inspector named Mr JR Lushington had aggrieved Waterton by imposing a hefty import tax on a collection of specimens that he was trying to take back to Walton Hall; it has been said that the contorted features of The Nondescript bear a startling resemblance to the maligned bureaucrat, although, sadly, there are no known portraits which might allow us to make the comparison for ourselves.

COURTESY OF WAKEFIELD MUSEUM

CURIOSITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS

As noted earlier, this was far from the only example of Waterton's work to take a bizarre and unexpected direction. But from that point onwards, he veered away from presenting his strange creations as real animals and towards the idea of taxidermy as a form of political commentary: an artform perhaps even more peculiar.

In "John Bull and the National Debt", an anthropomorphic depiction of England is seen being swamped by the 'devils' of financial burden – although quite why Waterton chose a porcupine with a human face to make this point remains unknown. Conversely, the symbolism behind "Martin Luther After His Fall" is almost childlike in its lack of subtlety, portraying the Protestant Luther as little more than a gorilla with horns.

But there is something about Waterton's work that is even more difficult to grasp than his unusual choice of medium, and that's how a man so dedicated to nature could willingly desecrate valuable specimens, hacking them up and contorting them into grim caricatures. Perhaps the most upsetting

He created a haven for thousands of wildfowl, starlings, barn owls and more



example of this is the case of Jenny, the first gorilla to be taken out of Africa alive. After winding up in a house on the north east coast of England, the poor creature lived a miserable existence, confined to an attic room and forced to wear human clothes for the entertainment of visitors. When Jenny died, Waterton was able to acquire her body, only to inflict one final humiliation on the unfortunate beast. Given donkey's ears, she was dubbed "Martin Luther" and preserved as yet another hostile commentary on the Protestant faith.

In later life, Waterton's love of wildlife grew, and his choices seemed ever more bizarre by comparison. Returning to Walton Hall for good in 1825, he retreated from the world, building a wall around his property and creating what would become the world's first nature reserve. While his neighbours built factories that belched toxic smoke into the atmosphere, Waterton effectively sealed off his estate's 250 acres, raising towers and tending hollowed-out trees to create a haven for thousands of wildfowl, starlings, barn owls and more. But for all of his desire to provide a safe habitat for the wild creatures that inhabited his estate, the aging explorer



ABOVE: Waterton's home at Walton Hall, to which he withdrew in 1825 to turn it into arguably the world's first nature reserve. **TOP:** Another side of his attitude to nature is revealed in the use to which he put the body of Jenny, the first gorilla to be brought alive from Africa: post mortem, she became 'Martin Luther'.



ABOVE: Boats on the lake at Walton Hall for Waterton's funeral in 1865; a flock of birds is said to have followed the coffin as it was rowed across the water.
BELOW: A sketch of Waterton in later life, which appeared in the *London Evening News* of 28 August 1844.

never seemed to see the irony in displaying his more outlandish and macabre creations for visiting parties to see.

Eventually, Waterton ended his days living a semi-reclusive lifestyle at Walton Hall,¹⁰ although he did invite everyone from local families to inmates of the lunatic asylum to share in the bucolic paradise he had created. Sharp as a tack to the end, it was little more than a stumble that eventually proved his undoing at the age of 82; an uncomfortably prosaic death for a man who had survived malaria, yellow fever, and the wrath of the countless creatures he took it upon himself to examine and categorise. At his funeral, it's said that a flock of birds followed the coffin across the lake, watching as their protector and champion embarked on his final adventure.

More than a century later, the famous naturalist Gerald Durrell summed up Waterton, whom he greatly admired, thus: "He was a man who did no harm to the world he lived in but enhanced it by his presence and his care of it." But while the creatures of Walton Hall would no doubt have agreed, one wonders how curiosities such as Jenny and the Nondescript might have felt about such an accolade.

For more on fortean taxidermy, see Dr Pat Morris, "The Curious World of Walter Potter", **FT305:32-37**, Ian Simmons, "Amazing Stuff", **FT305:38-39**, Alexis Turner, "Freaks and Fakes", **FT380:46-51**.

NOTES

1 In the winter of 1817, Waterton travelled to Rome for an audience with Pope Pius VII. His intention was to discuss the "state of religion among the Indians in South America," but this plan was derailed when he



took on a bet to climb to the top of St Peter's Basilica, leaving his gloves at the top. The Pope, it seems, was unimpressed by this endeavour, and refused to meet Waterton. *Charles Waterton: Traveller and Conservationist*, Julia Blackburn, 1989.

2 The young Waterton appears to have had something of an affinity with electricity. In her biography, Blackburn recounts the following event: "Once he was walking across the cricket field at night with a bundle of metal rat-traps under his arm. There was thunder in the air and suddenly, without knowing why, he dropped the traps and ran as fast as he could: he just escaped being struck by a bolt of lightning."

3 *Wanderings in South America*, Charles Waterton, 1973.

4 For his part, Waterton appears to have been against the practice of slavery, stating: "I never possesses [sic] a slave in my life, or any part of a plantation. From 1807 to 1812, at intervals, I administered to the estate of an uncle, and others; during the period, the yellow fever and tertian ageu [sic] kept giving me frequent hints that there was not much pleasure to be expected from being 'surrounded by slaves and attendants.'" *Magazine of Natural History*, Volume VI 1833, Letter from Charles Waterton.

5 Of particular note to forteans, Waterton's adventures also included tales of indigenous people with "long tails" as well as a "horrible beast, called the Water-mama, which, when it happens to take a spite against a canoe, rises out of the river, and in the most unrelenting manner possible carries both canoe and Indians down to the bottom with it, and there destroys them." Waterton, 1973.

6 The Waterton collection is currently on loan from Stonyhurst College. www.wakefield.gov.uk/events-and-culture/museums/wakefield-museum.

7 During Waterton's time, and right up until the 1950s, the character of John Bull served as a British forerunner of and counterpart to Uncle Sam.

8 *Timehri*, Vol. X, p. 252-3, December 1896.

9 Waterton, 1973.

10 Although Waterton did not return to South America after his fourth wandering, he continued taking sporadic jaunts to Europe in the company of his late wife's sisters. On one trip to Naples, in 1840, he witnessed a miracle known as the Liquefaction of the Blood of Saint Januarius, in which a phial of dried blood turned to liquid before his eyes. Blackburn, 1989. See **FT16:5, 51:23, 52:4, 65:36-41, 82:48, 117:8, 350:8-9, 395:26**.

✦ **SUSAN MARSH** is a freelance writer whose work focuses on forgotten histories, cosmic jokes and monsters in their many forms. She is based in Bristol, where she helps to run an anarchist bookshop and enjoys collecting stories from the margins of life.

LIVES OF THE GREAT OCCULTISTS

For many years, **KEVIN JACKSON** and **HUNT EMERSON** have been celebrating key figures in the history of the occult in the pages of *Fortean Times*, bringing the exploits of everyone from Athanasius Kircher to Aleister Crowley to hilarious cartoon life. As their 'Lives of the Great Occultists' series is collected in book form, Kevin reflects on a 10-year journey through the humorous side of the Hermetic Tradition, while Hunt provides the funny pictures...

Personally, I blame that Aleister Crowley. If my memory serves me well (which, these days, it seldom does), Hunt Emerson and I more or less drifted into creating 'Lives of the Great Occultists' after I told him a couple of my favourite yarns about the Great Beast. For a couple of decades or so, Hunt had been writing and drawing a regular series of cartoons called "Phenomenomix" for *Fortean Times*. One month, he was stuck for a subject, and decided to use one of these yarns, which I'd found in William Seabrook's book *Witchcraft*. One afternoon in New York, Seabrook had seen Crowley fall into step behind a stranger, mimic the man's walk, and then deliberately stumble. The poor chap hit the deck! And Seabrook was convinced that he had witnessed a genuine feat of Magick...

This was fun to write and draw; so were Crowley's other pranks and japes. Somehow or other we decided to do a few more strips about magicians and mystics, expecting to run out of subjects fairly soon. But the more we sniffed around in the world of the arcane, the more wonderful characters we found – eccentrics and oddballs of all kinds, geniuses and charlatans, great writers and artists, delusional twits, scoundrels and lunatics. To qualify as suitable candidates, they needed just two things: (a) biographies with plenty of scope for being turned into comedies and (b) a commitment to occult beliefs and the magical arts. Before long, we had dozens and dozens of subjects begging at the door to be admitted to the gallery.

But why, a few of my more sceptical friends asked me in a pitying manner, was I wasting my time dealing with people whose beliefs were at best primitive and at worst simply drivel? A good question, to which I would reply in various ways. To scholarly people, I would cite a maxim attributed to the great 20th-century student of Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem: "Nonsense is nonsense, but the history of nonsense is science". (Not that Hunt and I are scientists, but, still...)

More often, I would ramble on a bit about



YOU DON'T NEED
TO BE A GREAT
OCCULTIST TO BE
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DOES SEEM TO HELP

the split between our reasoning selves and our emotional selves. Scientific thought is a relative late-comer to the human party: in Britain it only establishes a beachhead in the late 17th century, with the Restoration and the founding of the Royal Society. Today, most of us would readily agree that it is the natural sciences which tell us all the important truths about how the Universe works. But quite a lot of us also glance at our horoscopes, cross our fingers for luck, and politely decline invitations to spend the night in a house said to be haunted. We may not believe in ghosts, but they still frighten us.

Which is to say that, though our heads may be modern, our hearts are often traditional, and we have more in common with our great-

great-grandparents than we care to admit.

The older, pre-modern occultists we have made fun of, and had fun with, in our comics may often have seemed odd to their contemporaries, but their ideas and practices were largely in harmony with general belief. Everyone knew that witches were real, and dangerous. Angels, demons and elementals were also real, and could be called on to intervene in human destinies. There was nothing implausible about predicting the future, reading minds, levitating large objects (in legend, this was how Merlin transported the giant rocks to make Stonehenge), or raising the dead for a chat.

Mind you, when a Great Occultist like Giordano Bruno (**FT269-272**) suggested that the Earth might revolve around the Sun, the Church burned him at the stake for heresy. Bruno was one of the first martyrs of science, and many of the discoveries made by other Great Occultists were also stepping stones towards the modern world. Sir Isaac Newton (**FT356**), probably the most brilliant scientist of all, is also one of our Great Occultists. You don't need to be an occultist to be a genius, but it does seem to help.

For modern, post-Enlightenment occultists, the position is very different. When science is the truth of all educated people, the believer in the occult is necessarily an outsider and a rebel and a crank. (Let us leave aside the question of established religion for a moment. Though let us also recall that Jesus of Nazareth turned water into wine, walked on the waves, cursed a tree, raised Lazarus from the dead and cast out demons.) To believe in magical powers nowadays is to risk being considered barmy. But for some Great Occultists, this is part of the appeal.

From the early 19th century onwards, as more and more of the Universe became understood by way of the telescope, the microscope, the scalpel and the test-tube, more and more thoughtful people became concerned that the Soul was going out of the world. "We murder to dissect," said Wordsworth, meaning both that taking a thing



HUNT EMERSON

Dr. Dee --- Prospero

to pieces destroys its capacity to give delight, and that the frame of mind which has the noble end of advancing knowledge also leaves a trail of dead frogs with their guts hanging out.

Science, so the fearful suspected, would make the world into a dull mechanism, lacking in joy. Rainbows, the argument ran, were becoming mere tricks of atmospheric vapour and refracted light, rather than heartrendingly beautiful reminders of God's pledge never to flood the world again. Biology told us that we were not fallen angels but risen apes. ("Darwinian man, though well-behaved, at best is only a monkey, shaved.") Despite strenuous efforts, no laboratory had ever shown the existence of a soul; perhaps we did not have them? The emotional shock of this was immense; the most profound intellects of the late Victorian period experienced the loss of faith as if it were a form of mental amputation, without anæsthetic.

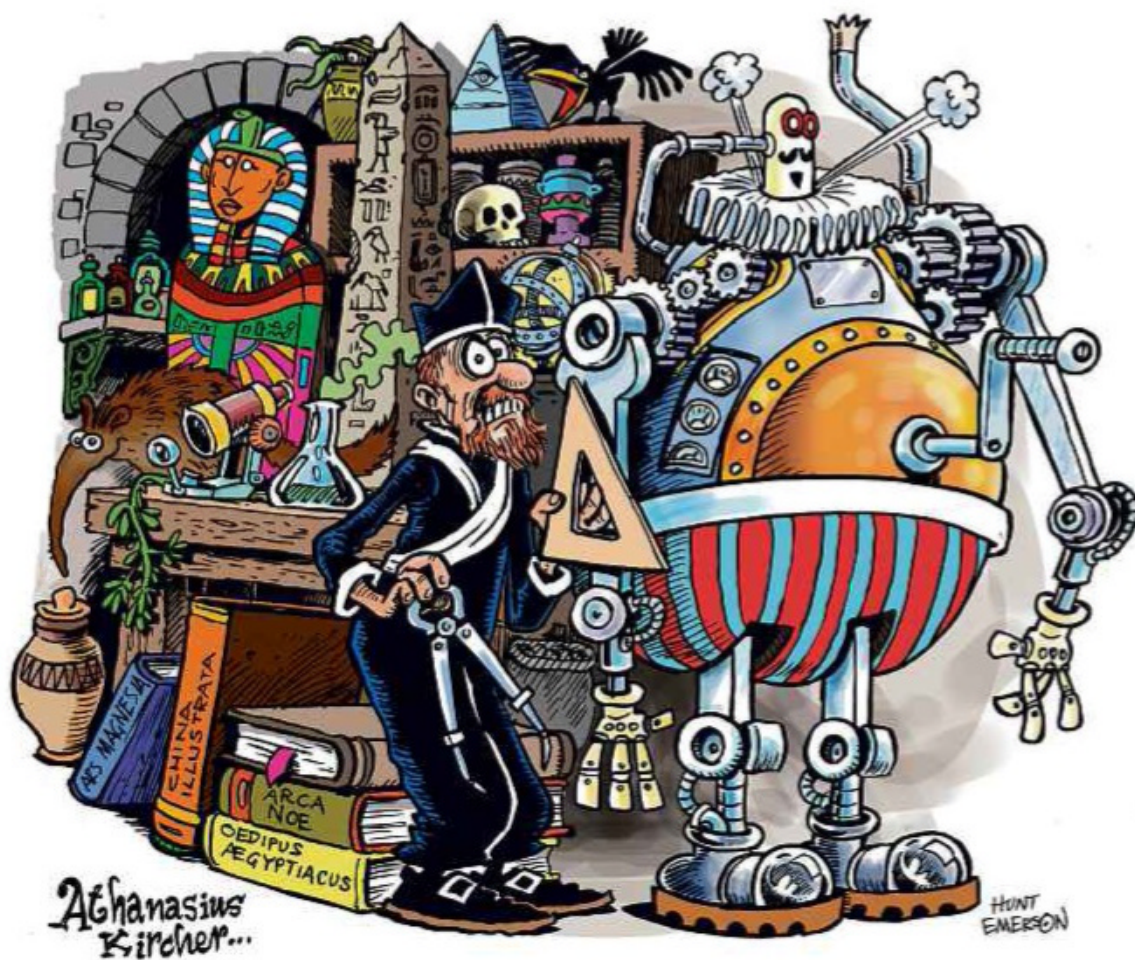
And so, wittingly or otherwise, modern occultists became something like a resistance force, an underground movement dedicated to stopping the world being stripped of all enchantment, and saying "Phooey!" to the new orthodoxy. The Romantic poet and artist William Blake (FT353-355) was a major figure in this resistance, and he was well aware of that fact. He hated materialist philosophers like the English thinker John Locke, and continental sceptics like Voltaire and Rousseau: "May God us keep/ From Single Vision and Newton's Sleep." Blake conversed with angels and the spirits of the dead, and he

saw glorious and terrifying visions, and he was utterly sure that the real world is the world described by the Prophets.

As the 20th-century English poet and Blake scholar Kathleen Raine often put it: true poets and artists are now the guardians of the sacred fountains. Their duty (and their bliss) is to keep alive all the mysteries which gave meaning to our ancestors, and which we still need for our psychic well-being whether we

know it or not. If the history of humanity is a single day, science and technology entered our lives a couple of minutes before midnight. Our man-made environment has changed astoundingly of late, but our hearts and minds remain much the same.

This was also the argument of another of our major subjects, the influential Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (FT321-325), who broke off angrily from his earlier mentor



and hero Sigmund Freud. Though not many experts would now agree with him, Freud was convinced that his “talking cure”, psychoanalysis, was rigorously scientific, and he was dismayed by the way in which Jung appeared to be plunging into what Freud called the muddy black tide of occultism.

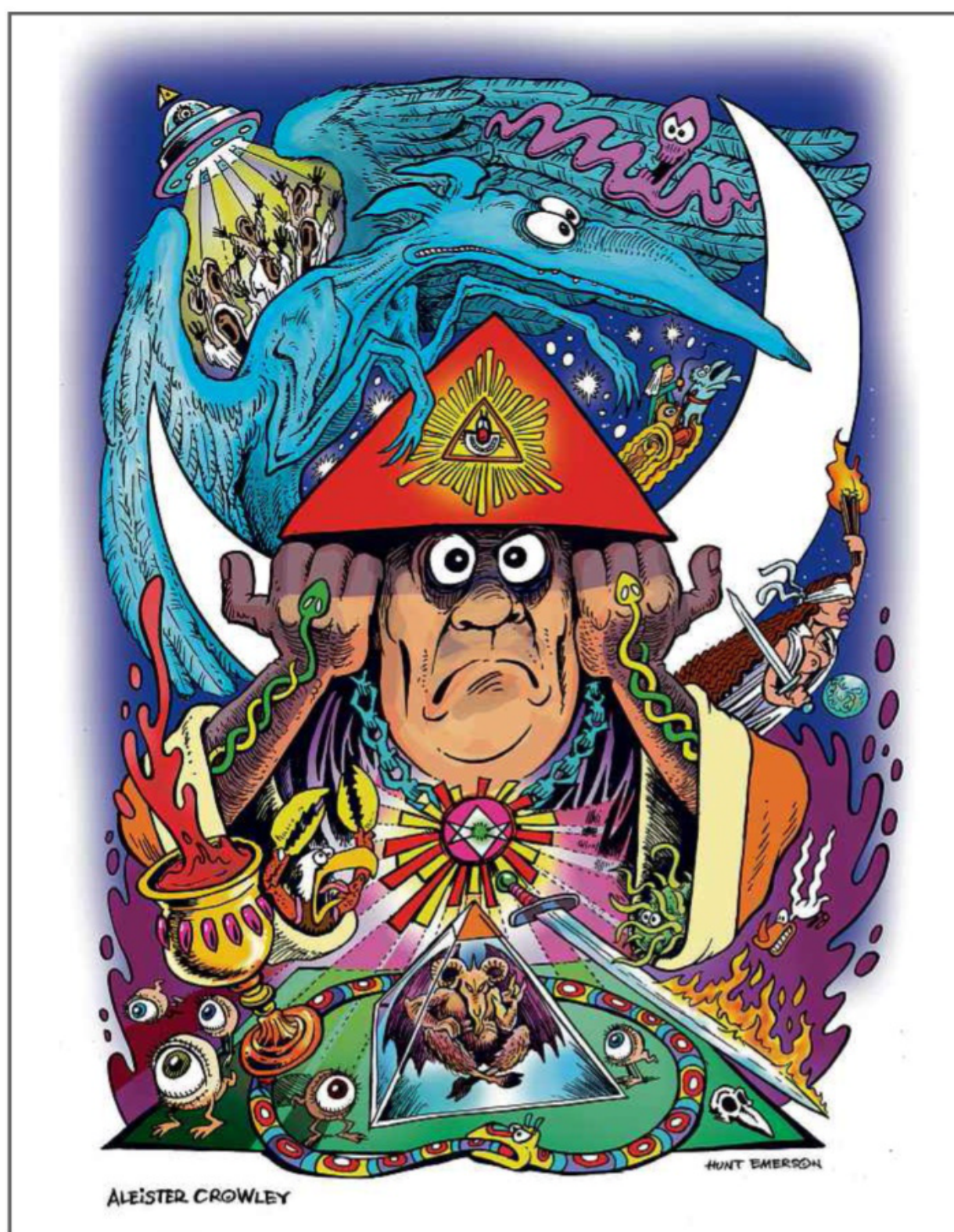
Whether or not that tide was muddy, Jung was certainly surfing it with glee. Jung, like Blake, thought that the modern world was in a state of extreme crisis because it had thrown the baby of spiritual experience out with the bath water of crude superstition. Believing Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and members of other religions were relatively immune to this blight, but the rest of us were suffering from a malnutrition of the soul. This crisis could be addressed, Jung thought, both by his own forms of talking cure and by the contemplation of the fundamental truths of all religion. Famously, he insisted that alchemy, far from being a crude lust after gold, was actually about the development of the human psyche – a quest for perfection through purification.

Neither historians of science nor modern psychologists believe a word of what Jung had to say on this subject, though plenty of artists have found it interesting and useful. Jung would have expected this, because he thought, as many anthropologists have also thought, that all of the arts had their origins in magic. Drawing, painting and the visual arts all seem to stem from the pictures of animals and men daubed on the walls of caves – images that still strike us as powerful, and were most probably aimed at summoning up a successful hunt. Poetry begins with the casting of verbal spells; music and dance with magical rituals.

Picasso, one of the rare artists of the modern world who managed to recapture the potency of cave art, was not an actual occultist, but his biographers have often called him a sorcerer and a magician. By the simple act of bringing together two bits of a bicycle, the seat and the handlebars, Picasso “created” the head of a deer. By the even simpler act of scribbling a line, he transformed a valueless scrap of paper into an object worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. By smearing some coloured lines on a canvas, he created objects worth millions. If this is not exactly alchemy in the literal sense, it is, surely, still a kind of magic?

So these are some of the more high-minded reasons for spending 10 years or so romping around the Western Hermetic Tradition. The more prosaic motive is simply that our heroes are so engaging. Among those I recall with most affection are John Dee – possibly the most brilliant polymath of the Elizabethan period (FT248); Maya Deren, the gorgeous film-maker and Voodoo priestess (FT287-288); Austin Osman Spare, cockney Michelangelo, cat-lover and inventor of sigil magic (FT297-300); and Jack Parsons, rocket scientist and admirer of Crowley (FT289-291).

Ah, Crowley, without whom we might never have set forth on this journey, who has provided us with so much material, and who seems to have encountered just about every modern occultist of any renown. Writing about The Beast has confirmed an old theory of



mine that the people who loathe Crowley and those who more or less worship him are not only barking up the wrong tree but aren't even in the right forest. Crowley seems to me an incarnation of the mythical figure that Jungian anthropologists have identified in almost every mythology – the Trickster. Among Native American nations, he is Coyote; to the Vikings, he was Loki. Crowley was the Trickster of the Western World (FT231, 264, 267, 276, 292, 357).

I like Crowley because he made mischief on a grand scale. Was he a murderer? Almost certainly not. Did he worship Satan? Nope. Did he have unusual powers? Apart from making strangers fall over in the street, and making all sorts of people do what he wanted them to do: Nah. His poetry is rubbish, his beliefs a loosely carpentered garden shed of utter hooey, and his general conduct that of a bounder and a cad. But he was a grand original, he stirred things up nicely, and some of his exploits continue to make me laugh, especially in the versions drawn by Hunt, who to my mind is also a magician of sorts. And I have to admit that when I slag Crowley off in print like this, I still take a nervous look over my shoulder.

Which is where we came in...



Extracted from *Lives of the Great Occultists* by Kevin Jackson & Hunt Emerson, published by Knockabout Books (www.knockaboutcomics.com/), RRP £12.99, on 17 September.

Signed copies are available from Hunt's website: <https://largecow.com/collections/books/products/lives-of-the-great-occultists>

◆ KEVIN JACKSON first wrote about the occult in a school project on Merlin; fortunately, it has not survived. In recent years he has dabbled in film-making, pataphysics and walrus poetry. He has derived enormous pleasure from collaborating with Hunt Emerson, with whom he shares an admiration for the creators of *MAD* magazine.

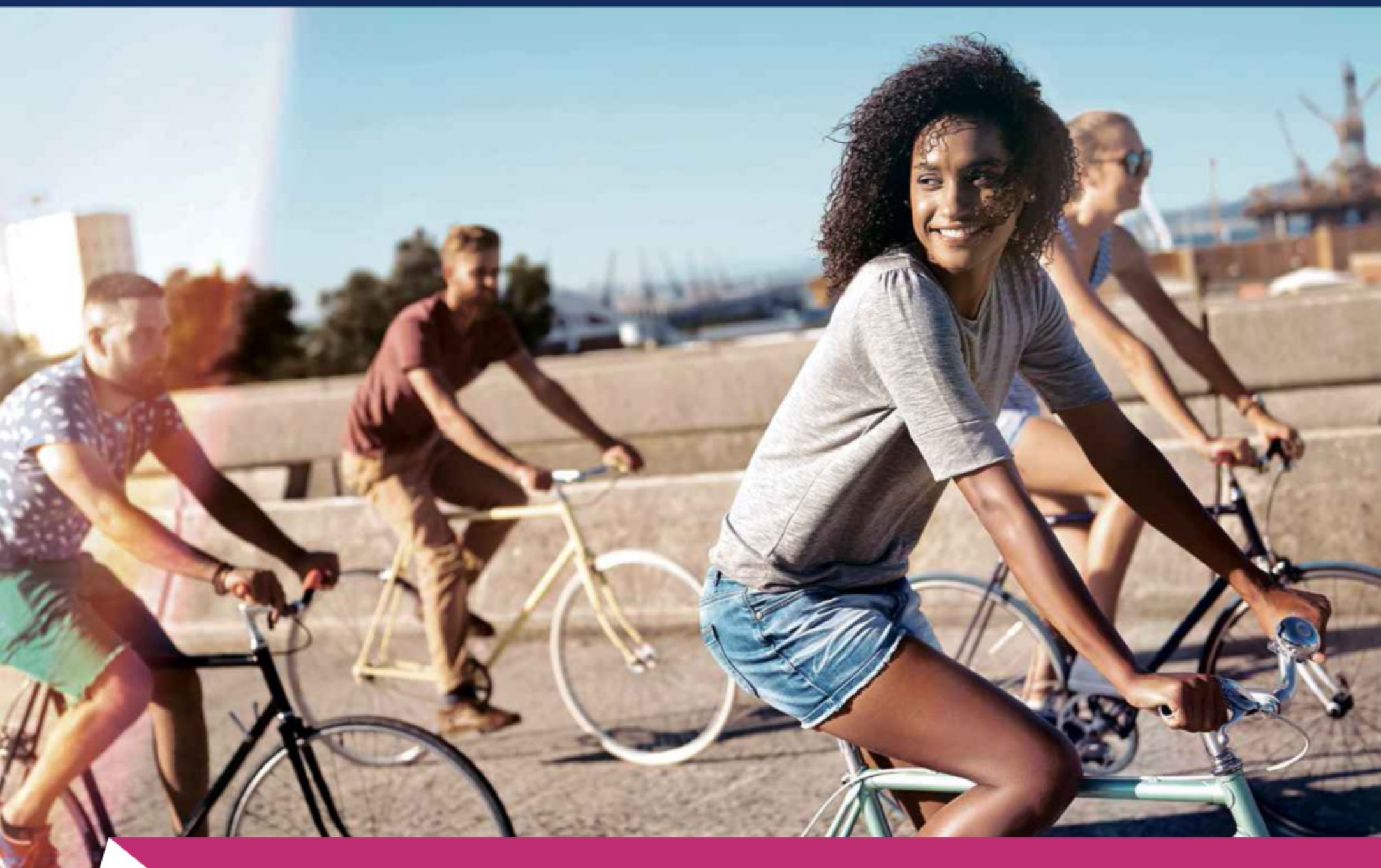
◆ HUNT EMERSON has drawn funny pictures all his life, and comics since the mid-1970s. He has a long-term interest in unexplained phenomena, the paranormal and the occult, and has drawn comics for *FT* since 1974. Hunt lives in Birmingham, where, he says, life is strange enough without any phenomenological nonsense.

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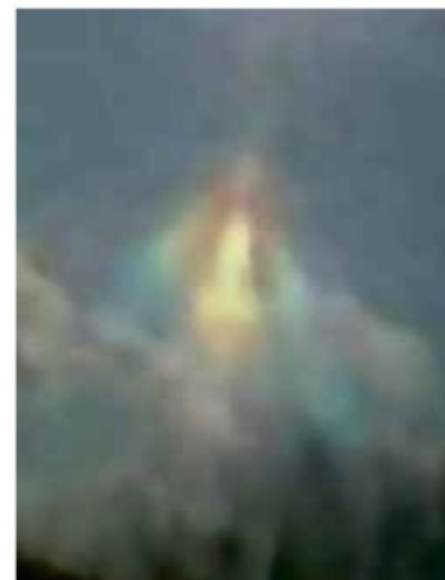
Covid Mary

TED HARRISON finds the Virgin Mary and family creating space in their diaries for coronavirus-related appearances around the world.

On 27 March, as Pope Francis was giving a blessing to the world, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared in the skies above the Vatican. An image of what has been claimed as a miraculous portent was captured on a mobile phone and shared on YouTube; and, indeed, there she is, glowing above the roofs of the Holy City in an otherwise gloomy and overcast sky. Although sceptics might irreverently suggest that what can be seen is simply an odd back-lit rain cloud formation, there is certainly a resemblance to classic images of the Mother of Jesus. For believers, however, the BVM's appearance was interpreted as her bringing comfort to a world suffering from the Covid-19 virus; many parts of Italy were badly affected at the time.

Significantly, or coincidentally, at the very moment the apparition became visible, Pope Francis was speaking about the lessons of the pandemic in a meditation for the faithful. Although addressing a largely deserted St Peter's Square, his message was transmitted live around the world. The pandemic is not God's judgment on humanity, he said, but God's call to people to "choose what matters... a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track." He then raised a monstrance containing a consecrated host and gave the benediction *urbi et orbi* – to the city and the world – which he normally does only at Christmas and Easter.¹

If sightings are to be believed, the BVM has been especially busy of late, being seen across the world as the virus spreads. Dozens of mobile phone photos have been



ABOVE LEFT: The apparition of the crucified Christ in Colombia. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The BVM appears in the skies over Argentina.

cited as evidence. A particularly striking image comes from San Carlos, Argentina. It shows an unusual array of lights which bears a resemblance to the BVM. Local people have seen the image as a sign that Mary is looking after them during the pandemic. According to *Catholic Online* reports, "the image looks remarkably like Our Lady, with a crown and blue rays of light cast to either side... Our Lady has often appeared during times of trial and tribulation, and the present moment would qualify."² An unnamed San Carlos resident said that "in the sky, a rainbow started to be seen, and then some drops started to create the figure of the Virgin in the sky surrounding the Sun."³

Other Marian images are less dramatic. The apparition of the BVM in a ciborium on the altar of a church in Michigan in April was less convincing – more of a mini-Mary – but was still reported as an appearance of Our Lady of the Tear of Joy "bringing comfort when we need comfort most".

Yet Mary is not the only member of the Holy Family putting in unexpected appearances. As the virus was taking hold of their country, dozens of Colombians in the town of Magangué broke the country's strict lockdown regulations to gather in front of a ceiba tree to see for themselves an image of Jesus that had appeared in its branches. It was only four days into the lockdown when rumours

of this miracle spread. Video from the scene shows dozens of people gathered in front of the tree, looking up at an image which appears similar to an image of the crucified Christ. Shopkeeper Agustina Diaz told reporters: "It can clearly be seen, and everybody is praying and asking for Earth to be cured of this evil and for Magangué to be protected."⁴ Police eventually broke up the gathering, and the crowds have not returned since.

Reports of holy apparitions at times of pestilence are not unprecedented. In 590, in plague-ravaged Rome, St Michael appeared to the future Pope Gregory, then only a deacon. He had organised a procession to take place through the city on 25 April that year. Plagues were often interpreted as being a punishment from God for human wickedness; the purpose of the procession was to express remorse, ask for forgiveness and pray for the pandemic to be brought to an end. As the procession approached the well-known landmark of the mausoleum of Emperor Hadrian, Gregory saw Michael the Archangel above the monument. He took it as a sign of God's forgiveness and, indeed, the plague, it is said, ceased at that moment. The mausoleum became known as The Castle of the Holy Angel, and years later a bronze statue of St Michael, sword in hand, was placed atop it. Michael made another appearance in 1631 in San Bernabe, Mexico, this time during

a smallpox epidemic. During a procession honouring Saint Mark, a certain Diego Lazaro had a personal vision in which he was told by the archangel of a well whose waters would have miraculous curative powers and instructed to lead the people to it.

Perhaps to allow her to clear her diary for her Covid-19 appearances, the BVM has ceased her regular appearances in Medjugorje. The visionary who claims to have been in contact with her has said that Mary will no longer appear to her on the second of every month, as she has reportedly done since 1987.⁵ Since then, the community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has thrived on the pilgrimage business, has itself been hit by Covid-19. Reports tell of the doors of the pilgrim church being shuttered and the Franciscan priests and nuns who manage the site themselves going into lockdown in a nearby convent.

NOTES

¹ *Catholic News Service*, 27 Mar 2020.

² *Catholic Online*, 27 Mar 2020.

³ *Daily Mail*, 27 Mar 2020.

⁴ *Daily Mail*, 7 Apr 2020.

⁵ *Catholic News Agency*, 18 Mar 2020.

♦ **TED HARRISON** is a writer, artist and former BBC religious affairs correspondent. He is a regular contributor to FT.

Amityville: Fact, fiction or fake?

The 'Amityville Horror' has been disputed and debunked, but **JOHN FRASER** wonders whether it was really just a fake haunting or something more complicated...

When looking at any poltergeist case, we need to establish whether the events even happened at all. If they didn't, then we're dealing with the first and most basic level of faking. What I would call the second level of faking is when the people and place existed, but the events, by and large, did not occur. To find the most famous example that many think fits this description, we need to cross the Atlantic to Suffolk County, New York State, and a small town of just under 10,000 inhabitants called Amityville.

According to the town's website, Amityville was once the haunt of "stage and theatre personalities, prominent members of society including businessmen, artists, writers and the so-called 'rich and famous' Manhattanites." It was also once the haunt of 'something' that became known as the 'Amityville Horror' – a story so clouded by movies claiming to be 'inspired by true events' that it is now surrounded in legend, the reality of the events obscured (see **FT190:32-37, 325:44-46**).

What is undoubtedly true is that in November 1974 the DeFeo family were murdered in their beds at 112 Ocean Avenue, Amityville: father, mother, two girls and two boys were all shot with a .35 calibre rifle. Ronald DeFeo, the remaining son, who probably had problems with drugs and drink, finally confessed to the murders. His attorney mounted an unsuccessful insanity plea, claiming that Ronald had been



ABOVE: The notorious house at 112 Ocean Avenue, Amityville, seen in 2005. **FACING PAGE:** George and Kathy Lutz in 1979.

hearing voices telling him to kill. DeFeo was sent to prison to serve six concurrent sentences of 25 years to life.

At the time, the case was big news and the property became a notorious 'house of death' that proved tricky to sell – at least until a year later, when George and Kathy Lutz spotted the large family home at a bargain price of \$80,000 and moved in with their three children in December 1975. Their stay was to last all of 28 days, after which they claimed to have fled in terror, never to return. What happened in those 28 days has been debated ever since.

Researchers Alan Gauld and Tony Cornell invented the useful notion of an 'intermediate poltergeist' case, one in which poltergeists and other phenomena are mixed up together. The phenomena at Amityville were certainly 'mixed up', and in fact followed no common pattern at all. They included a walkabout

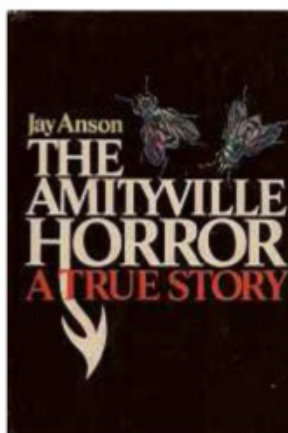
4ft- (1.2m) tall Chinese lion statue, which appeared in the living room after George Lutz had taken it upstairs; he also claimed that when he tripped over the lion he found 'bite' marks on his leg; we

have no photographs of these possible poltergeist marks, and colliding with a four-foot statue could easily leave a significant bruise. George would also wake up to the sound of the front door slamming, and claimed that locks, doors and windows in the house were damaged by

an unseen force. Overall, he got off lightly compared with the experiences of Kathy Lutz, who levitated off her bed and received welts on her chest from an unseen hand. So far, then, we have some elements that have something in common with such cases as 'The Cage' in St Osyth (bruising and marking by an unseen entity; see **FT293:19, 327:34-37**) and the Enfield Poltergeist (possible levitation of at least one of the girls; see **FT32:47-48, 33:4-5**,

288:18-19, 329:51). From here, though, the phenomena took on a life of their own and included a demonic pig that became an imaginary friend of the Lutzes' five-year-old daughter, and cloven hoofprints appearing in the snow. (One tracking expert stated: "Tracks can become distorted and expand dramatically as snow melts. In deep, melted snow I've actually seen people mistake squirrel tracks for those of a bear.") There were also swarms of flies and smells of excrement, though it seems quite plausible that one could be the cause of the other. In addition, green 'goo' ran down the walls and crosses turned upside down – touches suggestive of *The Exorcist*, the 1973 movie that shocked the public even more than the real-life murders at Amityville did. Kathy had nightmares about the murders and George kept waking up at 3.15am, which he believed to be the time of death of the house's previous inhabitants.

Such events are possible to conceive of without recourse to any paranormal explanation. It seems to me quite believable that the family might have





been freaked out by the house and began viewing a series of unfortunate events with a paranormal slant. Certainly, when they saw a 'demon' in the soot at the back of the fireplace it seems a clear case of pareidolia – the mind finding meaning in a pattern when nothing is really there – as when someone finds the image of Jesus on a slice of burnt toast. Perhaps the Lutzes freaked themselves out to the extent that their fears might even have triggered a genuine poltergeist episode – or is this, as many would argue, too generous an assumption to make?

Because of the notoriety of the house, when the Lutzes vacated the premises after 28 days they walked out into a media frenzy. Ronald DeFeo's lawyer, William Weber, even looked into the possibility that some natural electric force in the house might be 'screwing up' people's heads as possible grounds for a retrial. He also discussed the possibility of a book with the Lutzes, though no deal was ever done, and the bestselling *The Amityville Horror* was ultimately written by Jay Anson in 1977, with a series of movies to follow. Weber was later to claim that he and the Lutzes had, over several bottles of wine, discussed embellishing the facts of the case. This has led to a claim that the whole thing was a hoax from beginning to end – a claim that might have some substance based on the following reasoning.

One key element in poltergeist cases, intermediate or otherwise, is witness testimony. In some cases, such as *The Cage*, *Enfield* and even the Pontefract Black Monk (see FT293:28-37), the pool of witnesses goes fairly deep; in the case of *Amityville*, the witness pool barely gets past the Lutz family. The one key witness, other than the Lutzes, in Anson's book is a Father Mancuso, who among other things was told to "Get out" by a strange voice when he tried to bless the house. The real priest in this instance was actually Father Ralph Pecoraro, who has signed an affidavit stating that he only spoke to the Lutzes over the phone; but then he subsequently said that he might have visited them, but saw nothing strange. Finally, however, in his only TV interview,



Why would the Lutzes come up with such atypical events?

he admitted that the incident had actually occurred. Such contradictions, while not falsifying the Lutzes' story, make for poor witness testimony.

The witness pool is so shallow that we should take seriously the possibility that very few of the strange events said to have taken place at Ocean Avenue actually happened; and, after all, it's striking that many of the events, when stripped of their 'horror story' setting, seem so trivial.

Much was made of George Lutz waking up at 3.15am nearly every night – but if a house move is always stressful, then a move to the house where a mass murder took place is potentially more stressful still. Add to that the fact that (according to Anson's book) the Lutzes were looking for property in the \$30–50,000 range before seeing 112 Ocean Avenue at the bargain price of \$80,000. This

common mistake of overextending a budget to buy a dream house would have added to the stress factor as well. There are so many psychological reasons that would have made George Lutz wake up in an early morning panic that a paranormal one is low down the list of explanations. Footprints in the snow are not proof of the Devil, and an invasion of flies and an unpleasant smell are more likely to indicate the need for a good plumber than anything else.

But if the story *was* pure invention, why would the Lutzes come up with such odd and atypical paranormal events? George Lutz himself pointed this out to ABC News, which reported: "He denies making anything up, saying that if they had, they would have come up with a better story." One explanation could be that they felt real fear and panic, for whatever reason, looked at all the odd things that had happened to them, and put them on the 'paranormal' list.

Another common line of attack on the *Amityville Horror* book has been the fact that Jay Anson decided to write the book using the formula of one chapter for each day in the house. Some have dissected this timeline and

discovered that there was no snow on the day that the footprints were reported, or no storms on a day when the book said there were. I have not checked the accuracy of this research, but would point out that there were no claims by the Lutzes to have kept a diary of the events: what happened when, after a significant lapse of time, would certainly have been an approximation at best. Try writing a detailed diary of what happened to you each day for the last month and you will quickly find that while the main events stand out, the exact day they happened can only be approximated. To treat Anson's book in this way and call 'fraud' if the events don't quite fit the day is, in my opinion, unfair.

Until his death in 2006 George Lutz remained adamant that, with the exception of one or two literary embellishments in the book, and a few more in the film, the events basically took place as presented. Both George and Kathy took a lie detector test, which they both passed. This again lessens the possibility of out-and-out fraud, despite this being argued by many commentators. Danny Lutz, the eldest son of Kathy and stepson of George, appeared in a 2013 documentary (reviewed FT308:63) in which he backed up the stories of his parents, recalling furniture moving around, voices whispering to him and that he had experienced 'bodily possession'.

So if not a case of fraud, as often argued, was *Amityville* simply a case of the misinterpretation of normal events as 'paranormal'? Or is there perhaps a possibility that the poltergeist-type events might have been caused by the stress of the situation the family found themselves in? As many other cases show, stress and fear are not unusual bedfellows for poltergeists...

Adapted and extracted from *Poltergeist! A New Investigation into Destructive Haunting* by John Fraser, 6th Books, £13.99.

♦ JOHN FRASER is a member of the Spontaneous Cases Committee and the Council of the Society for Psychical Research and has previously been Vice Chair (Investigations) of The Ghost Club.

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Can we trust scientists?

Now more than ever we need science to be reliable, says **Mark Greener** – but many scientific studies are careless, faulty or even fraudulent, and can't be replicated successfully

Science Fictions

Exposing Fraud, Bias, Negligence and Hype in Science

Stuart Ritchie

Bodley Head 2020

Hb, 353pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781847925657

Something is rotten in the state of science. Some papers report results that are “seemingly impossible” and occasionally “outright fraudulent”. Books and media reports of robust, reputable studies can still be “incorrect, exaggerated, or dramatically misleading”. In “the very worst cases”, the fraud, bias, negligence and hype that’s all too common in science means that, this important and, because of Covid-19, timely new book warns, “people are dying”.

Science projects an aura of robust, reliable rationality. Reproducibility, for example, ensures the finding is real and not due to chance or human or technical error. But researchers “subjectively rated” that they replicated the results from only 39 per cent of 100 studies published in three leading psychology journals. On average, the replicated effect was only half that in the original study. Moreover, 97 per cent of the original studies had statistically significant results: there was a less than a one in 20 chance the results were a fluke. (Stuart Ritchie offers an excellent explanation of the use and abuse of statistical significance.) This declined to 36 per cent in the replicated studies.

As Ritchie notes in this insightful, engaging and readable book, the replication rate

in other social science and psychological studies ranges from 38 to 62 per cent. (Fittingly, Ritchie is a psychologist. In many ways, psychology is in the forefront of attempts to address science’s issues.) A couple of drug companies found that they could replicate just 11 and 20 per cent of their preclinical studies (experiments, such as those on animals, before a medicine reaches humans). To allow replication, a paper is supposed to give full details of the method. But only one of 268 biomedical studies, including clinical trials, reported their full protocol. We can’t, of course, replicate ‘Oumuamua’s transit or Schliemann’s excavation of Troy. Nevertheless, a full protocol helps you decide how “robust” the study really is.

Ritchie uses a telling montage of anecdotes, aptly focusing on the biosciences. After all, you don’t die from an error in an equation describing quantum field theory, but you could die from medicines or surgery based on dodgy science. To complicate matters further, biologists use model organisms – such as rats, mice, fruit flies and zebra fish – to

screen possible medicines (most of which are useless or toxic) or investigate pathways underlying disease. Such studies are impractical and unethical in humans.

Yet as Alexander Pope noted, the proper study of mankind is man: about 90 per cent of results from mice do not apply to humans. Nevertheless, over years, accumulating evidence leads to new treatments. But it’s rare for an animal study to have an

Scientists are prone to irrationality, biases, lapses in attention and outright cheating

immediate transformative effect outside the field’s cognoscenti. Unfortunately, overzealous PR can hype a small incremental advance in, say, genetic analysis, a disease pathway or a new drug target into a breakthrough: as a medical journalist I’m used to reading a press release hyping a finding as a landmark, only to find that it’s in mice and it’ll be many years before the supporting human data emerges.

Ritchie wrote most of the book before Covid-19. But he notes that “some of the papers,” early in the outbreak at least, “were of obviously low quality, rushed out to capitalise on the media frenzy about the pandemic.” Clearly, researchers need to publish potentially life-saving information quickly. Inevitably, however, the haste to save lives led to publication of inaccurate or insufficiently checked information and papers that, often inadvertently, fuelled myths, misconceptions and conspiracy theories.

Scientists are supposed to act as a community, Ritchie notes, scrutinising, questioning, revising, refining and finally reaching a consensus. Usually, the system works and scientists are increasingly aware of the issues Ritchie outlines. So, increasing numbers of papers are retracted. Ritchie reports that only around 40 per cent of the retractions are due to honest error. Many are tainted by unethical behaviour such as duplicate publications and

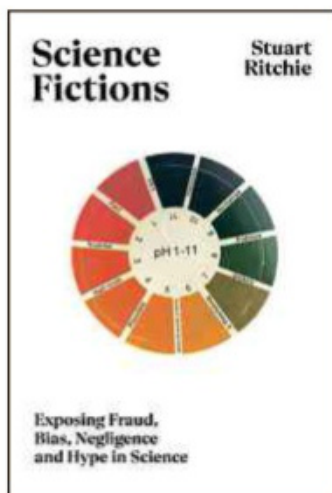
plagiarism. About 20 per cent of the retractions are due to fraud. Indeed, an anonymous survey found that one in 50 scientists admitted to faking data at least once. But, Ritchie notes, people may be reluctant to admit faking data even when anonymous.

Against this background, Ritchie issues a clarion call to revolutionise scientific performance and scrutiny. Computer algorithms can, for example, weed out unsophisticated fraud, inadvertent errors or sloppy design. But, I suspect, if someone really wants to they’d find a way to circumvent the checks. Nevertheless, raising the barrier is an important deterrent and quality control. Ritchie also advocates sharing data. But there’s so much money tied up in some data that I can’t imagine a company wanting to share. That’s not, of course, any reason to ignore Ritchie’s call: every incremental improvement is essential.

At heart, however, science, for all its protestations of objectivity, is a human endeavour. Like the rest of us, scientists are “prone to... irrationality, biases, lapses in attention, in-group favouritism and outright cheating to get what they want”.

In 1830, Charles Babbage wrote *Reflections on the Decline of Science in England, and on Some of its Causes* in which he created a “taxonomy of scientific ills” including hoaxing, forging, trimming and cooking – basically manipulating data. Almost two centuries later, Ritchie’s book presents a compelling case for developing ways to minimise fraud, bias, negligence and hype, as well as more “radical proposals that would revolutionise the way science is done”. For all our sakes, I hope scientists listen.

★★★★★



Disenchantment

The Enlightenment rejected magic, but often for bad reasons rather than good

The Decline of Magic

Britain in the Enlightenment

Michael Hunter

Yale University Press 2020
Hb, 288pp, £25, ISBN 9780300243581

In the 17th century, belief in prophecies, omens, ghosts, apparitions and fairies was commonplace, but in the subsequent century such certainties were swept away. This change has been attributed to science – in particular to the scientists of the Royal Society.

In fact, the Royal Society avoided the issue of magic because its members' views on the subject were so divided. As Michael Hunter puts it: "It was only in retrospect that this silence was interpreted as judgmental."

The pioneers of scepticism and the "disenchantment of the world" (in Max Weber's phrase) were humanist freethinkers, Deists, scoffers and wits in the coffee houses, whose ideas were expressed more often orally than in print.

The fact that they were also sceptical of Christianity – indeed they were often accused of scandalous "atheism" – tarnished their reputation and delayed general acceptance of their anti-magical views.

Meanwhile, doctors like Sir Hans Sloane might seem modern in their claim that a belief in magic was a physiological problem that they could cure, but the treatments they promoted – like blood-letting and purging – went back to classical antiquity and were anything but empirical.

The argument of fraud proved inconclusive, as illustrated by the famous poltergeist case

known as "the Drummer of Tedworth", on which opinion was divided from the outset. When the general climate of opinion changed, it did so through a kind of cultural osmosis, and the growth of confidence in a stable, rational world in which magic no longer had a place.

"It was a matter of assurance rather than proof, even though the fashionable trappings of Newtonianism were often invoked in connection with it," writes Hunter.

"The implication of such findings is that, contrary to popular belief, the Enlight-

enment did not reject magic for good reasons but for bad ones. This means that the validity of the phenomena involved remains as much an open question now as was the case in 1700." An eminently fortean point of view.

There's a fascinating chapter on second sight in Scotland.

Besides the major players, such as Robert Boyle and Joseph Glanvill, the author's lucid and detailed exposition introduces us to a cast of lesser-known writers – such as Francis Hutchinson, Obadiah Oddy and Richard Mead – as he sketches the broader context in which the seismic shift in attitude occurred, while acknowledging the gulf between educated and popular opinion.

One can only echo Prof Ronald Hutton's opinion of this book: "It completely overhauls our view of that subject, answering questions which have hung over it for decades, and raises some exciting and disturbing questions for the present."

Paul Sieveking
★★★★



I Want To Believe

Posadism, UFOs And Apocalypse Communism

AM Gittlitz

Pluto Press 2020

Pb, 272pp, £17.99, ISBN 9780745340777

This book doesn't mock Argentinian Trotskyist J Posadas (Homero Cristalli); it respects the genuine struggles he and his supporters engaged in. Posadas and his movement organised trade unions, peasant collectives and guerrilla bands under circumstances of extreme oppression. Many of his militants were tortured and murdered. His son-in-law was disappeared by the Argentinian Junta. *I Want To Believe* does critique his politics and his more outlandish beliefs, but sets them in context.

It is difficult to separate his politics from the fortean. His influence had waned by the time Peron returned to Argentina in 1973, but when gun fights broke out between Left and Right wing Peronists at the airport, Posadas was blamed. The shooting was really organised by Lopez Regas, a practitioner of Espiritismo, a religious syncretism similar to Santería. He wanted to turn Peronism into an occult theology of the Argentinian race to overcome modernity. He was also a member of the Propaganda Due (P2) Italian masonic lodge. His aim, which succeeded, was to drive Peron to the right.

Posadas supported a First Strike nuclear attack by the USSR believing that it would result in the final destruction of capitalism. The Posadist nuclei around the world would take a leadership role after the war to enable recovery. The Posadists had some influence in Cuba but lost this when they called on the USSR to break the US blockade of the country. Castro was denounced as a reformist because he also wanted to avoid a nuclear conflagration. Ché Guevara was sympathetic to the Trotskyists and when he disappeared on his foreign adventures Posadas claimed that Raul Castro had personally killed him for becoming a Trotskyist. When Ché was killed in Bolivia in 1967, Posadas said it was fake news.



Even back in 1917 the Bolshevik Futurists believed that advanced races existed elsewhere in the galaxy and it was our destiny to link up with them. The 1947 UFO wave convinced some Posadists that Intra-Galactic socialists were arriving, but such discussion was discouraged. By 1967 Posadas had mellowed to the Red ET hypothesis. UFOs had to come from advanced socialist societies to have developed interstellar travel. Posadas believed we should "appeal to the beings on other planets to intervene and collaborate with Earth's inhabitants in suppressing poverty."

Posadas wasn't clear as to whether sentient dolphins would steer the UFOs, but he saw a role for these cetaceans alongside humans after he read John Lilly's writings that "dolphins were a second terrestrial intelligence... capable of complex communication, planning and empathy." The theories of Russian New Age midwife Igor Charovsky also proved attractive. Children born underwater "developed vastly superior mental and physical abilities". Experimental births in the Black Sea attracted wild dolphins who formed a telepathic link with the mothers and acted as midwives. Together with dolphins such children would form the new socialist wave.

Posadas died in 1981 and his international movement has faded into obscurity, but he has won a new following online with meme-sters and pranksters spreading "his message". The Men in Red stormed the stage at the Sixth World Ufology Symposium in 1998, demanding the "self determination of an interspecies evolution". A 2016 board game, *Trot Wars*, featured Posadas as a playable character. The Intergalactic Workers League – Posadist lampoons Scientology, offering socialist "stress tests" in the streets of New York. On the 2018 May Day parade they carried a Slavic-style icon of Posadas and wore T-shirts depicting UFOs. So Posadas is remembered in memes of mushroom clouds, leaping dolphins and whizzing UFOs. But he was once a professional footballer. I can imagine an alternative history where Posadas managed Argentina and Camus led France as they met in the 1966 World Cup. [For more on Posadism, see FT176:40-45].

Páirc O'Corráin
★★★★



Deadly Voyager

The Ancient Comet Strike that Changed Earth and Human History

James Lawrence Powell

www.deadlyvoyager.net 2020 / Amazon

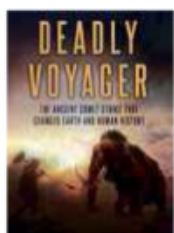
Pb, 130pp, £20.22, ISBN 9780578666778

The Younger Dryas Impact Hypothesis – the idea that, around 12,800 years ago, a cometary impact plunged the planet into a mini Ice Age, wiping out many species and obliterating some human cultures – has become something of a touchstone in parts of the ancient mysteries community. Writers such as Graham Hancock have used the hypothesis both to cast doubt on orthodox theories about early human cultures, and to provide a potential space and time for early advanced cultures to have arisen and disappeared.

James Powell is no ancient mysteries enthusiast. A distinguished geologist and academic, now retired, he has written several books on geology and the communication of science. *Deadly Voyager* is an account of the development of the impact hypothesis and the opposition to it, in the highly partisan and contested arena that constitutes American academia in general, and the question of early human occupation of the Americas in particular.

It also raises the spectre of a broader and, for some, more fundamental, controversy. Since Lyell and Darwin, orthodox science has generally held to the theory of uniformitarianism, where it is axiomatic that processes now observed have always occurred, and these processes provide a sufficient explanation for past events. The Younger Dryas Impact Hypothesis rekindles the heretical fires of catastrophism, the idea that unique, anomalous events radically altered the landscape, and the history of the species that inhabit it.

Powell uses the KT Boundary event (a cometary impact that signalled the demise of the dinosaurs), and the almost fanatical opposition to it, as an example of the kind of struggle that the Younger Dryas hypothesis has faced. The KT event is now generally (but not universally)



accepted; perhaps because it is far enough in the past – around 66 million years ago – to blunt its catastrophist implications. A similarly large-scale event within human memory may prove too much for uniformitarian sensibilities to bear.

Deadly Voyager is a clear, simple account of the accumulation of evidence for the Younger Dryas impact, and the opposition the hypothesis has encountered. Powell makes it clear that, in his opinion, the attempts at refuting the evidence fall a little short of scientific best practice, and owe more to entrenched attitudes than an open-minded search for certainty. He makes a good case, too; by the end of the book I was fairly convinced by the patient accumulation of evidence for a cometary impact, and far less convinced by the arguments against it.

Does Powell's succinct and persuasive argument open the door for a resurgence of Atlantean theorising? Well, no, in a word; but it does to some extent vindicate the efforts of those in the ancient mysteries community who have promoted the idea of a celestial impact and a series of abrupt and profound changes at the start of the Holocene. The problems that undermine the Atlantean conjecture (lack of concrete evidence, for the most part) have not been swept away with Clovis culture and the megafauna of the ancient Americas. But if the proponents of the impact hypothesis gain real traction, the necessary shift in paradigmatic views may provide an opportunity for a thorough reappraisal of the story of humanity – and a host of other species – during a period that is both crucial for our understanding of our ancient history and poorly understood.

Noel Rooney

★★★★

Walking the Great North line

From Stonehenge to Lindisfarne to discover the mysteries of our ancient past

Robert Twigger

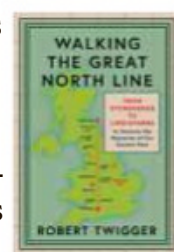
Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2020

Hb, 304pp, £20, ISBN 9781474609074

Robert Twigger is a popular travel author with a fondness for warm exotic places. This time, however, he describes his wild-camping

(not asking permission), 300 mile walk, in the summer of 2018, from Christchurch Harbour to Lindisfarne following the Great North Line – a MacGuffin he discovered himself, namely the longitudinal quasi-ley line 1° 50 west that seemingly connects Stonehenge, via Avebury, Arbor Low, Mam Tor and Raby Castle to Lindisfarne, with many small pre-Roman sites in between.

Despite the avowed spiritual purpose of the pilgrimage, all the major admission-charging sites are unvisited (they should be free and communal property) and, upon leaving Derbyshire, his interest in the megalithic appears to wane in favour of trying to cross rivers and bogs without drowning. Most of the time he relates pedestrian, uneventful, rural encounters with our natural



flora (nettles, brambles, tick-infested ferns) and fauna (geese, distant deer, a possible fox, but no mice) and people. He loathes horse-mounted folk, landowners and farmers, while is at one with squaddies and northern chav dads but, despite his egalitarian bent, seemingly not with fellow travellers.

Unexpectedly, the book becomes more interesting when he describes his footsore days walking through large northern towns and cities and is at its best recounting the 20 mile (32km) hike through Birmingham. However, his depictions of Halifax “Land of the Living Dead” and the sun-filled arcadia that is Brum's Sutton Coldfield may well be unrecognisable to their inhabitants.

The trek and sites are glossed by insights from his inner monologue, including lashings of popular cultural references and soft (rather dated) Eastern mysticism; most of the short chapters finish with calls towards the benefits of shamanism and a return to an earlier more natural lifestyle from “our ancient past”. He does once achieve an almost Zen koan moment in his question “Why are houses square?” (current archaeological thinking is that they reflect the hearth) but these universal, yea, almost cosmic moments are rare.

While frequent stops at cafés for a “flat white and almond croissant”, into pubs for a

boutique beer, or nights spent at friends' grand houses take the ‘grim’ out of pilgrimage, they seem to put the ‘sham’ into shaman. A one-tone read, more physical than spiritual, this travelogue can be read as a remembrance of pre-lock down times.

Rob Ixer

★★

The Engineering of Coincidence

A scientific explanation of magic

Robert Ramsay

www.robertramsaysay.org 2019 / Amazon

Pb, 113pp, £6, ISBN 9781650399850

“There are no coincidences, but sometimes the pattern is more obvious,” sang the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band, and in this book Robert Ramsay attempts to explore – not explain, please note – the science that might underpin “magic”, which has many definitions including it being “the science of coincidence”.

Part one touches on quantum physics, entropy and chaos theory, introducing the concept of “the timeless multiverse”, applying them all to a theory of magic. It gets more interesting in the second half of the book when Ramsay introduces the effect that belief can have on reality, touching on the ideas of chaos magic's Pete Carroll and psychedelic philosopher Robert Anton Wilson; accepting that weird shit can and does happen and learning to work with it, to nudge “reality” in the direction

we would like. Ramsay offers a series of experiments involving sigils, a method popularised by Austin Osman Spare in which a clearly defined desire is reduced first to a written statement and then to a symbol which embodies the desire but loses the meaning before being committed to the subconscious, where it lies dormant but whirring away.

People will either lap this stuff up or discard it as woo-age nonsense, but there is a middle way. Try the experiments yourself and see. What have you got to lose but your prejudices about what we laughingly call “reality”?

Andy Roberts

★★★★



Embassy under attack?

The astonishing story of how diplomats at the US embassy in Cuba fell prey to illnesses supposedly caused by a mysterious new weapon

Havana Syndrome

Mass Psychogenic Illness and the Real Story Behind the Embassy Mystery and Hysteria

Robert W Baloh & Robert E Bartholomew

Springer 2020

Pb, 194pp, £24.99, ISBN 9783030407452

In late 2016, American Embassy staff in Havana, Cuba, were subjected to mysterious sonic attacks that caused a variety of worrying health problems [see FT359:22, 360:14, 363:4, 366:8, 370:27, 382:10-11, 389:26]. Their symptoms ranged from headaches, fatigue, dizziness, confusion and memory loss to hearing problems, which included experiencing pain, pressure, tinnitus, hearing loss and sensitivity to sound. These were thought to be caused by a new weapon that made a sound described as high-pitched, buzzing, chirping, humming or grinding.

The situation was so bad that it helped derail a two-year initiative to restore amicable relations between the two countries and led to the expulsion of several Cuban diplomats based in Washington. In December 2017 there was a bombshell revelation that a study of 21 embassy staff found white matter changes in their brains. This was conducted by the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, which noted: "These individuals appeared to have sustained injury to widespread brain networks." When their report was published it showed little evidence to support that statement.

A year later, a study of 35 embassy staff by the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine claimed they suffered from inner ear damage to the otolith organs that regulate balance, gravity and sense of movement. Once again the media

reported this as evidence of attacks, but it merely showed the most common symptom was dizziness.

Pesticides were blamed in a Canadian study of a similar attack at their embassy, but that did not explain why it only affected embassy staff and not other workers in the same building.

As early as March 2017 the Cuban authorities set up an investigation committee, which in December 2017 concluded that the US attacks were caused by collective psychogenic disorder – in other words, mass hysteria. They noted that audio recordings of the attacks are identical to the

mating call of the Indies short-tailed cricket (*Anurogryllus celerinictus*) and to the sound of Jamaican field crickets (*Gryllus assimilis*). As the authors show, there have been numerous scares caused by insects and other creatures, including blood-sucking kissing bugs and cabbage

worms.

The US experts regarded mass hysteria as being a sign of mental disorder and weak-mindedness, and regarded the Havana Syndrome as being unique. Yet Baloh and Bartholomew prove in painstaking detail the long history of psychogenic outbreaks that are triggered by warfare, new technology, repressive religious and secular settings and by fears of insects, terrorists and phantom assailants.

They note that in every conflict traumatised soldiers have displayed unexplained symptoms. In World War I it was called shell shock and involved neurological complaints similar to actual brain injuries; in the US Civil War soldiers suffered from cardiac-type symptoms, known as heart syndrome; in World War II it was battle fatigue, and more recently soldiers have suffered Gulf War

Syndrome.

Clusters of psychogenic illnesses are also seen in civilian populations triggered by fears and rumours. For example, a mysterious hum was heard by residents coming from the giraffe enclosure at Paignton Zoo, Devon. A nearby boiler was ruled out as the culprit but the complaints escalated when a study reported that giraffes communicate by humming, yet their barely audible hum was nothing like the sick-inducing humming reported by residents.

Many instances are caused by the nocebo effect: while the placebo effect makes you better through suggestion, the nocebo effect makes you feel worse. So in a stressful situation with negative expectations (such as rumours about acoustic weapons), ambiguous and common aches and pains turn into worsening symptoms of an attack.

The authors conclude that in Cuba there was a credible threat, as embassy staff were living in a hostile, foreign territory. Therefore, it was easy for them to think they were being targeted by a weapon. Information about these "attacks" was transmitted among the relatively small group of staff, and new members of staff were even informed that they might be subjected to a mysterious threat that could cause long-lasting symptoms. This made them all highly sensitive to anything unusual in their environment and the state of their health. Scientific studies contaminated by confirmation bias only helped fuel emotive media headlines and make the situation even worse. In other words, it was a classic case of psychogenic illness which the authors claim "is a collective stress reaction in normal people."

This is a brilliant exposition of how social panics evolve and escalate; every forteen should read it.

Nigel Watson

★★★★★

A Curious History of Sex

Kate Lister

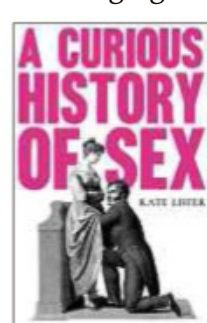
Unbound 2020

Hb, 456pp, £25, ISBN 9781783528059

The second chapter in this gloriously enjoyable book begins "I love the word c—t", but without the dash. It's an indication of what the book's going to be like.

Don't read this if you're easily offended. Do read it if you're open-minded, enjoy discovering a wealth of historical details and love coming across (so to speak) slang words and euphemisms beyond your wildest dreams.

"Humans are... the only creatures that stigmatise, punish and create shame around their sexual desires," the author says. *A Curious History of Sex* builds on the author's website (www.thewhoresofyore.com), which is "dedicated to exploring the history of human sexuality and challenging shame and stigma".



There are chapters on some of the more intriguing physical details of female and male anatomy; on sex and food, including real

and imaginary aphrodisiacs; and sex and machines, in which the author lays to rest (with regret) the urban myth that Victorian doctors invented the vibrator to cure women of their hysteria. A 19th-century French physician warned female cyclists that "the unusual physical exertion, combined with the perilous lack of corsetry, would damage the feminine organs of matrimonial necessity and shake them loose."

John Harvey Kellogg created "plain cereals" to "suppress urges" and "subdue lust". He was also in the forefront of discouraging masturbation by promoting circumcision for small boys – without anaesthetic "as the brief pain... will have a salutary effect upon the mind".

For a sideways look at social history this beautifully illustrated book has nuggets on every page. People in the Renaissance may have been the great unwashed, but "Mediæval lovers valued clean bodies... and their harlots smelled of lavender."

Jay Vickers

★★★★★



ALSO RECEIVED | WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS ONLY TO GET LOST DOWN THE BACK OF BOB RICKARD’S SOFA...

Mary Magdalene Revealed
The First Apostle, Her Feminist Gospel & the Christianity We Haven’t Tried Yet

Meggan Watterson
Hay House, 2019
HB, £19.99, 264pp. ISBN 9781401954901

Since the discovery in 1945 in Egypt of a library of early Christian Coptic texts – often referred to as the ‘Gnostic Gospels’ – one of the most interesting and controversial texts to have emerged (and the only one attributed to a woman) has been that titled the ‘Gospel of Mary Magdalene’. Instead of the peripheral figure with a rumoured seedy past, as she is conventionally presented in both the historical canon and modern orthodox commentaries, this Gospel shows her to be Jesus’s closest disciple, and quite possibly his wife. In what presents as her own voice, her account tells of how she rallied the apostles after the Crucifixion and relayed to them Jesus’s innermost teachings. There are several books devoted to this overthrow of the traditional picture, but Watterson’s focuses upon the profound implications of the Gospel’s feminist message, both in highlighting Mary’s role and in restoring the feminist aspect to wisdom teachings, which miraculously survived the Church’s fourth century censorship.

Near-Death Experiences
A Historical Exploration from the Ancient World to the Present Day

Marisa St Clair
Amber Books, 2019
PB, £14.99, 160pp. ISBN 9781782748892

There are a number of good studies of near-death experiences and this well-designed, glossy presentation tries not to compete with the primary, scholarly sources. Instead, it presents an overview of the subject, and does so as satisfactorily as you could hope for in terms of the historical accounts, the people who report NDEs, those who study them, the theories and related subjects (such as out-of-the-body experiences,

ghosts and doubles) and what we know about death and dying. It is clearly, sensitively and intelligently written and well illustrated with relevant images. In fact, it would make an excellent introduction for someone new to the subject, and perhaps even for an inquiring young mind.

The Magical History of Britain

Martin Wall
Amberley Publishing, 2019
HB, £20.00, 304pp. ISBN 9781445677088

This is a bold project by a skilled and knowledgeable author, who has set out to write not a history of magic “as we know it” but “an alternative magical history” of the gods, wizards, seers, prophets and others “who have influenced ‘real’ history in ways of which many modern people are no longer aware”. While he claims that “any resemblance to mainstream historical scholarship is purely coincidental,” his scholarly apparatus is apparent but never dominates this rich, wild and exciting ride through the fact and fiction of a ‘Jungian’ magical history of these isles. He conjures an exciting landscape – using ideas and imagery drawn from Tolkien, Alfred Watkins, Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, the early mystery religions, and many of history’s dreamers, prophets, mystics and magicians – building chapters around particular people, places or events. Very good, and eminently re-readable.

Russian Black Magic
The Beliefs and Practices of Heretics and Blasphemers

Natasha Helvin
Destiny Books/Inner Traditions, 2019
PB, £12.99, 170pp. ISBN 9781620558874

We were hoping for considerable insight into a subject little studied outside the Soviet Union and indeed, the author – a daughter, apparently, of generations of Slavic witches – draws aside the curtain in her first four chapters, particularly when dealing with the Veretnics (who exploit Christian symbolism), and their popular demonology

with its nine Princes. This seems to be a relic, of sorts, from the forced conversion “of the Kievan Rus”, whose paganism went underground and mixed with Hindu and Jewish traditions. The remaining chapters detail various (and often bloody) rites and spells. An academic study this is not; but it is certainly interesting and leaves the reader wanting to know a lot more about the subject’s regional history and origins.

Ghost Tours of Hertfordshire and Essex

Jenni Kemp
Austin Macauley Publishers, 2019
PB, £11.99, 225pp. ISBN 9781788484817

Jenni Kemp is to be congratulated on the amount of work and attention to detail in this pretty thorough guide to a part of England with a rich history of ghostlore. She lays out itineraries for 62 tours, involving 280 towns and villages. More than 800 individual sites are listed and described, with map coordinates and local histories highlighting such topics as notorious crimes, haunts, poltergeists, deaths and tragedies, mysteries, and even some forteana. This was the territory covered by the witch-hunting maniac Matthew Hopkins. As excellent as it is, it would have been more comprehensive if her stories were referenced more fully; but there is, at least, a general list of her sources at the back.

Alien Threat from the Moon
Evidence of Ancient and Alien Life

Dylance Clearfield
G Stempien Publishing, 2016
PB, £7.90, 123pp. ISBN 9780930472153

The author presents a study of NASA photographs of the Moon taken no later than the early 1970s, stating his belief that “they are free of NASA ‘cleansing’ and therefore retaining the anomalous features that were in the originals.” He then processed them with “a scanning device of profound power which was not supposed to have been released to the public.” The

result is a catalogue of extremely blurry and blocky images which Clearfield declares to be of buildings and cities, giant sculptures, alterations of Lunar landscapes, and vast sheets of “perforated metal”. Among them, he also spots alien craft cunningly disguised by “saucer-” and “cigar-” shapes. Not everyone will be convinced.

Hikey Sprites
The Twilight of a Norfolk Tradition

Ray Loveday
Privately published: <https://hikeysprites.weebly.com/>
PB, £6.00, 48pp. ISBN 9780900616990

Ray Loveday, a folklorist of Norfolk, had a life-long interest in the county’s particular variation of the puckish pixies, known locally as Hikey Sprites, the lore of which is evidently fading from living memory. For six years he sought out hundreds of “elderly Norfolk people”, recording their direct experiences or recollections of bits of local lore, along the way documenting and mapping 23 variants of the eponymous name. Loveday and colleague Dick Burrell have illustrated some of the more than 140 accounts – giving us something that looks like a cross between a tiny Green Man, a house fairy and a spikey goblin. This short book is an excellent example of how a small publication can focus on a specific topic and do it very well.

LDN Reimagined
A Surreal Visual Journey that will Change your Perception of London

Robert John
Unicom Publishing, 2019
HB, £25.00, 176pp. ISBN 9781911604907

FT has always admired creative vision. In this lush book, London-born artist Robert John alters images of the city to portray an otherworldly place with an eerie, dream-like beauty, one that is at once familiar and yet strikingly surreal and sometimes disturbing. The project was inspired by the visionary experiences of his father, who suffered dementia. The only fault in this absorbingly fascinating tour is that some of the images get lost in the book’s central gutter.

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Back to the Outback

Astonishingly, it's 51 years since Nicolas Roeg directed his first solo feature, but *Walkabout* remains an intensely modern film that explores the hallucinatory territory between memory and reality



Walkabout

Dir Nicolas Roeg, UK 1971
Second Sight, £26.99 (Blu-ray)

A new, limited edition Blu-ray of *Walkabout* gives us an excuse to discuss it: not so much a review as a contemplation. Apparently, the slipcase includes paperbacks of the original novel, the script and new essays, none of which were seen for review so can't be commented on, but which explain the high price for a single disc. But the disc itself includes a number of fascinating interviews with cast, director and producer – and an astute remark by Danny Boyle, who clearly adores *Walkabout*, that despite being filmed 51 years ago, it remains an intensely modern film.

We all know the story. A teenage girl (Jenny Agutter) and her young brother (Luc Roeg) are stranded in the Australian Outback when their father inexplicably kills himself. An Aboriginal youth on walkabout (David Gulpilil) comes across them, and helps them survive for a few days. The Girl finds it impossible to communicate with him: "We want water. To drink. You must understand that. I can't make it any simpler." She can't see why the Youth doesn't

"It's very difficult to actually put your finger on what it's about"

understand her; she's speaking impeccable English, after all. The Boy mimes, and the Youth understands immediately. The Girl is the product of a posh girls' school, with ingrained if unconscious cultural attitudes; she's a bit awkward, a bit stiff. The Boy is a child; he hasn't yet learned social and class barriers.

Eventually the Girl and Boy work their way back to the civilisation they know. In the final scene the Girl is grown up; her husband comes home and tells her about his job opportunities. You can see she's trapped in the world of her parents. In her mind we see her, relaxed and happy, swimming naked in a pool with her brother and the Youth.

In one of the extras, Agutter says: "It's full of strong imagery; it's quite mysterious; it's very difficult to actually put your finger on what it's about."

Walkabout was released in 1971, but was filmed in 1969 (before Agutter's *The Railway*

Children, which was released first). The three principal actors were all very young; Agutter and Gulpilil were 16 and Roeg was seven. Agutter had already appeared in several films and TV series; she's become one of Britain's most successful actresses. Gulpilil, who grew up in the bush, was already a skilled tribal dancer; he has become a renowned dancer, actor, singer and storyteller. Roeg, son of director Nicholas Roeg (*Performance*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*), moved into film production (*We Need to Talk About Kevin*).

Walkabout was Nicholas Roeg's first solo film as director, and his last as cinematographer. His filming of the Outback is astonishing: wild and big and untamed and colourful and full of life. In contrast, the harsh brick walls at the beginning and end of the film emphasise the artificiality, the shut-in-ness, even brutalism of Western civilisation.

There's a timelessness about *Walkabout*. We don't know how many days the story covers, or if the events happen in the order they're portrayed – or even if they all happen in reality. The film is deliberately hallucinatory. The Boy sees the sea; but it's a mirage. They watch wild camels passing by; then, overlaid on the scene, are camels being ridden. During the film the Girl swims in a pool alone; in her memory at the end, the three swim together. What is reality? What is memory? What is truth?

There's a spirituality, but it's not the gentle New Age kind that white middle-class Europeans tend to impose on aboriginal beliefs. The right-of-passage ritual of walkabout changed a child into a man. It was harsh; it was about survival. The Youth spears a kangaroo and other creatures for food; but he is horrified when he sees white hunters shooting animals for sport.

A gulf is apparant not just between the Girl and the Youth, but between the Girl and the Outback. She wears her school uniform almost as an identity, a statement: white, middle-class, privileged. She's protective of her brother, but in a practical rather than loving way; it's her role to look after him. For most of the film she is distanced, her school uniform setting her apart from her environment. When they're about to return to the life they know, she tells the Boy: "I'm glad I washed your things. You want to look nice when they find us."

Everyone remembers the swimming scenes, but there are various levels of sexuality in the film. The swimming is sensitively shot: natural and relaxed and playful rather than sexual. Contrast the innocence (or naïvety) of the Girl and the blatant crude sexuality of the scenes with the weather balloon scientists, or the white owner of the Aborigine tourist tat factory. After the three have been playing in a tree, the Youth looks up at it and sees branches like smooth legs and thighs – beautifully, naturally erotic. The Girl and the Youth are on the cusp of adulthood. He performs a courtship dance for her, but she rebuffs him. There are consequences: he dies – from exhaustion or suicide? Sex and death. She shows a rare moment of tenderness in wiping the flies off his body with her hand: an intimate act, but too late.

Near the end of the film the children are about to step onto the road. The Girl looks down. There's a clear demarcation between the natural earth they've been walking on for days, and the artificial surface of the road. There's a pause; and then she takes a deliberate step onto the road, back into the unnatural world she knows.

David V Barrett





The Vigil

Dir Keith Thomas, US 2019
On general release

An intriguing supernatural horror film set among Brooklyn's Hasidic community, this doesn't quite deliver on its first half hour, but is nevertheless remarkably effective.

Yakov (Dave Davis) has recently left a strict orthodox Jewish group and is slowly adapting to life in the 'outside world'. A former friend, keen to get Yakov back in the fold, offers him a one-off job as a Shomer – someone who, in Jewish religion, watches over the body of a deceased person until they are buried. Needing the money, Yakov accepts. His task is to stay with the corpse – an old man named Rubin Litvak – from midnight until dawn. This being a horror film, it's at this point that everything goes south. It starts with Litvak's widow, who mutters an obscure warning before hobbling into the darkness of the upper floor. Then the strange noises begin, and the feeling of being watched. And then the sightings...

All this stuff is genuinely scary – proper shiver-down-the spine moments – and director Thomas sustains it as long as he possibly can. Inevitably, though, the exposition has to start sometime, which is where films of this type fall down. The contrivances stack up in order to keep Yakov in the house, but out of contact with anyone save Mrs Litvak. Virtually all horror films require suspension of disbelief, but when you can spot the mechanics at work it does spoil things. What the film offers from then on is a curious mix of horror clichés – fingernails dropping off, slimy things emerging from mouths, thumping industrial noises – and fascinating glimpses of Jewish mythology. The ending is most satisfying, following through on the film's narrative and theme.

Dave Davis is outstanding as Yakov: it's very much his film – he's in practically every frame of it, and seizes the opportunity. The score by Michael Yezerski is also particularly good. Director Thomas won't be feted in years to come as a man who changed the face of cinema, but with *The Vigil* he has delivered an effective, interesting, and very creepy horror film.

Daniel King



THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.peterlaws.co.uk)

Host

Dir Rob Savage, UK 2020

Available to stream on Shudder (shudder.com)

The Tomb: Devil's Revenge

Dir Jared Cohn, US 2019

4Digital Media, £9.99 (DVD)

It's a demonic invasion special this month, where evil attacks via Zoom and Tomb!

Host is the former, where a group of social distancing friends get so bored of lockdown they organise a séance via the conferencing app Zoom. For the first 20 minutes you'll chuckle at the classic video-call quirks we've all come to know: talking over one another; crappy camera angles; messing around with virtual backgrounds etc. Once we're firmly bedded in this immediately relevant, recognisable world, however, the demons 'Join the Chat'.

Host was made during lockdown, which is a remarkable achievement in itself. The tension, pacing, acting and (in particular) the special effects are all impressive – in fact, this is better than many well-planned, big-budget Hollywood tech-horrors. The film is freaking audiences out too. Stephen King loved it. His son, Joe Hill, called it 'Scary AF'. It's not perfect, and once the demons really let rip, it feels like you're watching six different found footage films all at once. Yet *Host* is so zeitgeisty it cannot fail to hit a nerve. Covid-19, the unseen invader, isolated us in our homes – and yet we managed to connect via technology. How fitting for a horror film to infect that very technology with another unseen invader – a demon.

Here's a tip: I always



"This break is just what our family needs," the wife beams as they all descend into Hell

thought it better to watch *The Blair Witch Project* on a VHS tape rather than in the cinema. Likewise, don't watch *Host* on a TV screen. Use your laptop instead and watch it as if it's an actual Zoom call...

I have a different tip for watching our next demonic movie – drink alcohol. It might help *The Tomb: Devil's Revenge* make more sense.



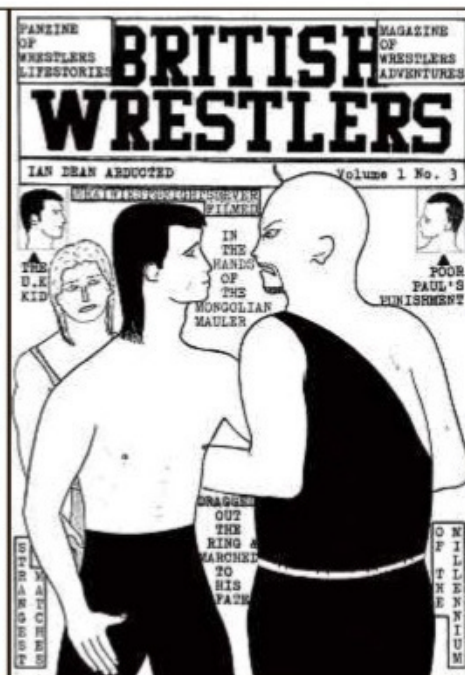
It's an inept, baffling film and yet... I had a great time watching it.

In a mash-up of Indiana Jones and John Carpenter's *The Fog*, a miserable archaeologist called John Brock pisses off a gang of GWAR-looking demons in a cave. When he returns to the surface, they follow him up. Brock is hopeless and spends most of the film either rubbing his eyes or punching random strangers. Thankfully his cruel dad (William Shatner) is there to shout some sense into him. Full disclosure, I adore Shatner, who makes the most of his meagre screen time by blowing demons to bits with a huge gun, giving speeches on the glory of horses and death and treating his son like dirt. Honestly, Bill is the most insensitive parent ever – at least until the ludicrous ending, where he suddenly flips to soft-focus. The demons look cool (at least in the dark) and it's mostly well shot; but make no mistake, this film is a mess, with a useless hero, boring, overlong caving scenes and ridiculous story moves – like when Brock goes to face the demons once and for all... and takes his wife and kids with him! "This break is just what our family needs," the wife beams, as they all descend into Hell. Couldn't they have tried Center Parcs?

Yet some 'movie messes' contain enough insanity to be quite a hoot. So did I enjoy this eccentric Shatner-produced adventure horror? I most certainly did... and I was sober!

British wrestling
always had a
dark side.
This magazine
explores it.
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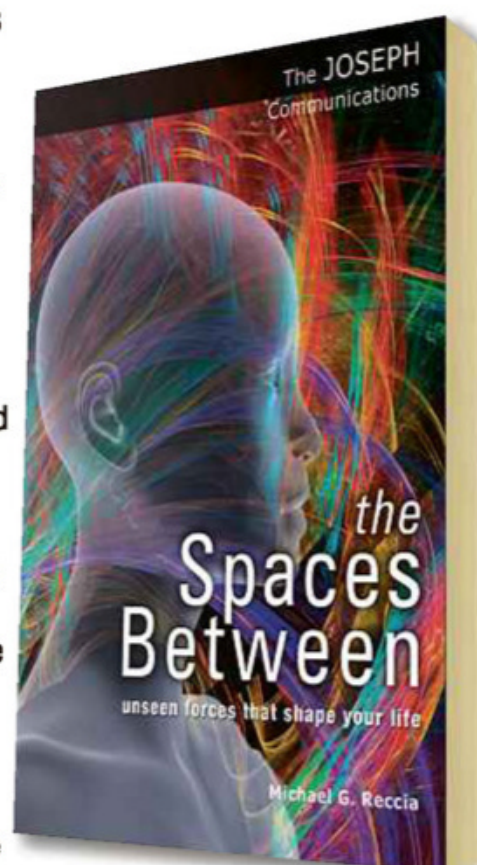
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Identity theft

A possible case of identity theft (Noel Rooney, “The Man Who Would Be Q”, FT395:42-44) involves reclusive American chess genius, madman, and *Fortean Times* namesake Bobby Fischer (1943-2008), who certainly haunted a generation of chess players. Around the turn of the millennium, rumours began to circulate that Fischer, who had played only one match in public in nearly 30 years, was playing chess anonymously on the Internet and still crushing his opponents. British grandmaster Nigel Short believed he had played Fischer in this way and wrote an article for the *Sunday Telegraph*, in the course of which he described Fischer as “The Loch Ness Monster of world chess”. However, the Internet Chess Club (ICC) believed there were at least three Fischer impersonators online at the time, drawn by Fischer’s legend, some armed with fiendishly strong chess computer programs, and the consensus is that Short encountered one of these (“Lost genius of chess returns – or is it just a case of Fool’s Mate?”, theguardian.com/technology/2001/sep/10/internetnews.internationalnews).

Relating to the same article, Milton Rokeach’s *The Three Christs of Ypsilanti* may have been one of the inspirations for Peter Barnes’s satirical play *The Ruling Class* (1968). This concerns an aristocrat who believes he is God: a Teutonic psychiatrist attempts to cure him by introducing him to a patient afflicted with the same delusion, a Scotsman who says things like “Away home, lad-die, before I burn ye to a crispy noodle”. It was made into a film starring Peter O’Toole, which is well worth any *fortean’s* time.

Richard George

St Albans, Hertfordshire

Erwin Saunders

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Bob Fischer’s piece on Erwin Saunders – Pixie Hunter [FT395:46-48]. Having watched the videos on the YouTube channel, I decided to dig a little deeper. After 15 minutes on Google I was able to link one

SIMULACRA CORNER



Hanna Suvanto spotted this cheeky monkey in Petts Wood, London.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 66598, London, N11 9EN or to sieveking@forteanimes.com.

particular video on the Erwin Saunders channel, “Searching for Wiltons Pixies”, to a video on the bustykelp YouTube channel, “Pixie”, uploaded 11 years ago. This led me to the Busty Kelp animation studio, the director of which is Paul Smith. On his LinkedIn profile, there is a clear resemblance with the Erwin character. Saunders is clearly an artistic endeavour in a mockumentary style with some phenomenal CGI, highlighting the capabilities of the aforementioned studio and director. Mystery solved – unless

the real Erwin Saunders pops up from the undergrowth and throws a pixie-sized spanner in the works!

Adam Waldock

By email

Just borrowed

Gavin Littaur, a London resident, wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* on 10 Feb 2020, and I thought his account was worth repeating for *FT* readers: “Recently, while I was brushing my teeth, a gold filling fell out and, to my exasperation, I watched it disappear with

the toothpaste down the basin plughole. I decided that, given the relatively low cost of a white filling replacement, I could not justify calling a plumber. The next morning, however, I found the filling on the edge of the basin. It was certainly not there before. Happily, the dentist fitted it back in perfectly. I live alone, I am not senile, and I am neither insane nor a liar. Do poltergeists exist after all?”

In letters the next day, Martin Smith blamed the tooth fairy, while Jean Clark of Eastbourne suggested it was not poltergeists but “the more benign but equally mischievous borrowers... Whatever they borrow they always return. Building a bookcase on Saturday [8 Feb 2020], I put all the fixings, including four bolts, in a box. At the final stage of assembly, however, the bolts were nowhere to be seen. After a search we conceded defeat, but on Sunday, when reaching for a towel on the top shelf in the garage, I spotted an old biscuit tin marked ‘miscellaneous’, and there, among the rusty tacks, nails and screws, were the four shiny bolts.”

Edward Young

London

Colours out of Space

Readers from Dorset may not be surprised by pools of water glistening with viscous colour [FT395:13]. In East Dorset there is oil, and, as you travel west, pools of surface water on Burning Cliff (near Ringstead), and probably other places on similar geology, are sometimes coloured similarly. I tend towards the oil/bacteria/iron hypothesis as iron pyrite, abundant in the rocks at Burning Cliff (so named because it was on fire for quite a few years; anærobic decomposition of iron pyrite igniting oil in the shales being the mooted cause), provides a ready source of iron compounds for the bacteria to use and oil is present in the shale strata exposed at the cliff. Alternatively it could be the little folk washing their paint-brushes!

Ben Mottram

By email

Rabbits and badgers

The letter about aliens collecting rabbits [FT395:72] reminded me of the late great Robert Anton Wilson's writings about the discipline of Lepu-fology, which focuses on the strange intersection between UFO sightings and rabbits. It is mentioned in *Quantum Psychology* and elsewhere and unearths such forteen gems as: Bugs Bunny being the first recorded UFO abductee (see the 1948 Looney Tunes cartoon *Haredevil Hare*); both *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *ET* featuring shots of rabbits long before we see any aliens; and Jimmy Carter being the only US President to have claimed to see a UFO and to have been attacked by a rabbit (while swimming apparently).

Those that have eyes to see...

- Following widespread reports of the natural world



responding to the side effects of lockdown (cf. the goats of Llandudno, FT392:7), I attach photographic evidence of somewhat unusual behaviour amongst the badger population of the Somerset Levels. For the second time in as many weeks, on the same stretch of road, I have come across a badger in party attire. In both instances the animal was sadly deceased, having presumably met their end on the way back from

their festivities. In fairness, the restrictions placed on mass gatherings such as illegal raves are not understood to have extended to mustelids.

The alternative pseudo-explanation that this is simply the result of a strange collision between a piece of road-kill and an individual with a surreal sense of humour is, I believe, rather far-fetched.

Peter Wilson

Taunton, Somerset

Hesitant shopping

I was impressed by the attentiveness of Robert Readman, a reader of London's *Evening Standard* (6 July 2020) who noted a topically prescient entry in the diaries of Samuel Pepys: "The taverns are full of gadabouts making merry [...] and though I may press my face against the window [...] I am tempted not by the sweetmeats within." A perfect ponder on today's covidian social distancing. Pepys concludes: "A dram in exchange for the pox is an ill bargain indeed."

Bob Rickard

London

African recycling

Further to Lewis JW Hurst's letter regarding historical sabotage of telegraph wires [FT394:71], another cause may have been the desire for free metal. As a young child in the 1960s I lived in Africa, and we took trips into some very rural areas, where sometimes the wire had been

completely stripped from the telephone poles along the side of the road and – according to my father, who was a telecoms engineer – used by the locals for their own purposes.

Regarding the Flat Earthers letters [FT394:74], it has always seemed to me that most if not all of them are simply having a joke and, as an intellectual exercise, thinking up explanations which appear to contradict conventional science.

Dave Miles

By email

Misleading promotion

I recently found this in *Zoo* magazine (August 1937): "From Leonard Farquhar, 3 Pield Heath Ave, Hillingdon, Middlesex, comes a story of what he saw when visiting near London an old fashioned fair with roundabouts and sideshows. He writes: 'One of these shows exhibited outside a large crude drawing of a man being attacked in an

underground sewer by a gigantic rat that was leaping upon him like a tiger. He was defending himself with a pickaxe. In sensational type the show announced: 'Biggest Rat in the World – 3 Feet Long – ALIVE – Caught in a London Sewer'. I paid the penny for admission, and found a crowd of people round a small wire cage in which, cowering unhappily in a corner, was not a sewer rat at all but a coypu."

Richard Muirhead

By email

Bees – and a green man

Regarding bees attending Margaret Bell's funeral in Ludlow [FT394:48], while researching for my book about growing up in that part of Shropshire, I came across the following report in *The Scotsman* (21 Aug 1844). It details the behaviour of some less friendly bees, kept in the same village that Mrs Bell kept hers (albeit some 150 years earlier): "At Leintwardine, last week, a

swarm of bees, which had been brushed off the mouth of the hive where they had clustered, became so irritated, that they set upon everything in their way, and stung to death twenty-six chickens and young ducks. The old poultry got out of their road, or they would probably have shared the same fate. After sundry gyrations, and other onslaughts upon man and beast, the night approaching, they returned quietly to the hive."

In another passage in the book – which is a mixture of prose, drawings and photos – I drew an allegorical encounter with a "green man of the woods" to symbolise my childhood relationship with nature. Upon reading Paul Devereux's description of his own encounter with a green man [FT393:55], I noted that my own green man – although fictional – as well as being made of "a tight, dense tangle of foliage... [having] a face... with deep-set eyes peering out of the green tangle" (to quote Mr Devereux), it too had no limbs, "standing like some otherworldly bollard". Those curious can purchase the book in four self-published instalments from my website: <https://smoo.bigcartel.com/category/where>
Simon Moreton
Bristol

Long known

Asterix and the Chariot Race (2017) [FT395:29] did not predict anything by giving the name "Coronavirus" to a charioteer; the term is a generic one which has been in use for some time. A coronavirus caused the 2003 SARS epidemic and has long been known to be a cause of the common cold. The term has currently been adopted as a substitute for the more correct Covid-19.

Martin Jenkins

London

Ghost Fads?

Reading the letter regarding Greyfriars by Alex Whyles [FT390:71] got me wondering about ghost scratches. They're a staple of modern ghost hunting, but as a phenomenon, where is the history or folklore? Supposing they are real phenomena rather



than fakery, why would ghosts start doing this when they didn't before?

Dean Teasdale
Gateshead

Alan Murdie responds:

Examples of ghostly scratches in historic cases and in folklore can be found in serious books on the history of the poltergeist. In this regard, as with so many other subjects, books and specialist journals from psychical research and parapsychology are far more informative and reliable than material to be viewed on the Internet. It should be noted that prior to 1848 the word 'poltergeist' was not used in English language publications, with the result that examples of strange scratching and biting phenomena may be discovered in the extensive literature that exists on historic ghosts, witchcraft, possession and stigmata.

Scratching noises themselves have been noted as an early feature in the early stages of a poltergeist outbreak; the alleged spirit of Cock Lane in 1761-62 was known as 'Scratching Fanny'. In rare cases, poltergeists are known to escalate to physical assaults, and scratches on individuals. Classic early examples occur in spiritual literature, as with the Blessed Christina Von Stommelm in Germany who suffered scratches and abrasions between 1260 and 1288, and in cases of alleged stigmata; four centuries later, in 1722 at Sandfeldt in Germany, children suffered pinches, bites and assaults as well as pelting with stones (see *Poltergeists*, 1979, by AD Cornell and Alan Gauld).

Among English 18th century cases, the best known is that of the Lamb Inn, Bristol, in 1761-62, involving sisters Mollie and Dobbie. They were the victims of bites, pinches and scratches inflicted by an invisible assailant, although details of the latter did not become more widely known until a pamphlet published in 1800 (re-issued in 1971 as *Witchcraft at the Lamb Inn*).

In 1804 what appears to be a poltergeist inflicted tears and scratches on clothes and dresses at Tanners Hall,

Sawston in Cambridgeshire. *Witches were again blamed* – see *Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore* (1969) by Enid Porter. Harry Price in his book *Poltergeist Over England* (1945) has a chapter on stigmatics and poltergeists, concentrating upon some of the international studies conducted in 1926 on Eleonore Zugun, a young Romanian girl, who suffered extensive cuts and abrasions attributed to an entity known as 'Dracu'. There is an extensive literature on her phenomena in English and German.

Shirley Hitchings suffered scratches on occasion during the long-running Battersea poltergeist case, 1956-1968 (See *The Poltergeist Prince*, 2013, by James Clarke and Shirley Hanlon). William Roll investigated a case of a scratching and biting poltergeist at Indianapolis in 1962 – see his *The Poltergeist* (1972).

Going outside Europe and North America: in September 1910 a case was recorded of a biting/pinching/rapping poltergeist at Turffontein, South Africa, which was blamed for moving objects and leaving "nail marks" on the arm of a 16-year-old girl. Guy Playfair discovered several disturbing Brazilian cases involving violent and scratching poltergeists from the 1960s, recorded by researchers in the country – see his *The Flying Cow* (1975). I saw reports of similar phenomena afflicting a teenager called Eva appearing in the Colombian press in 1999 – see *El Tiempo*, 15 April 1999.

I agree with the conclusion of George Owen in chapter 10 of *Can We Explain The Poltergeist?* (1964): "The phenomenon is... real but extremely rare" – though doubtless many cases have not been recorded.

Jovian moons

Stephen Collier shared the fascinating account of an eagle-eyed elderly lady who appeared to be able to discern Jupiter's four brightest moons, first described by Galileo in 1609-1610, without the assistance of an optical instrument [FT390:69]. Was she pulling his leg? Collier cited

Patrick Moore's opinion that two or three Jovian satellites have on occasion been spotted with the unaided eye, but never four, at least incontestably.

Readers may be interested in the following passage from the book *Facts from Space!* (2016) by the American astronomer Dean Regas: "Some rare humans possess unbelievably amazing eyesight and can see the four Galilean moons with their naked eye. While pointing out Jupiter to a class, a sharp-eyed first-grader asked, 'What are those stars right next to Jupiter?' He continued, 'There's like three to the left of Jupiter and one to the right.' The telescope confirmed exactly what he saw with his naked eye."

William Frederick Denning (1848-1931), an amateur astronomer based in Bristol, was able to discern Jupiter's third and fourth brightest moons without a telescope by covering the rays from the planet's margins (JJ von Littrow, *Die Wunder des Himmels*, 6th edition [1878], p.521). Another rather stunning observation of all four was made in about 1970 by Valerie, the eight-year-old daughter of E Talmadge Mentall of Dorchester, Massachusetts; details are in DAJ Seargent, *Weird Astronomy* (2011), p.223.

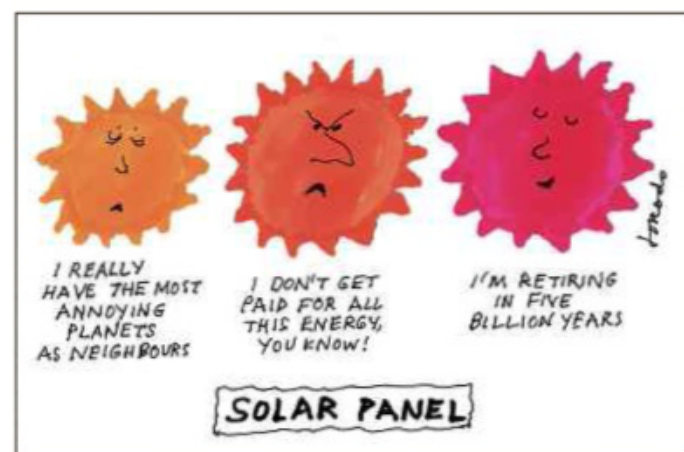
There is no urgent reason to discard such reports. Astronomer Bradley E Schaefer produced a mathematical model of glare which predicts that "normal observers cannot hope to see the Galilean satellites under even the best of conditions," but "keen-eyed observers should be able to spot all four moons at elongation under optimal conditions." ('Glare and Celestial Visibility', *Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific*, 103 [1991], p.651).

Such ideal conditions obtained in the arid homeland of the San people in southern Africa. In San tradition, Dawn's Heart was a character identified with Jupiter in its rôle as morning

star, who swallows and regurgitates his daughter Dawn's Heart Child; the latter, in turn, spits out another child. Some researchers believe that the myth incorporated knowledge of Jupiter's moons, which the San could see either because of above-average eyesight or through an unknown observational technique. (WP Koorts, 'The Nature of the Dawn's Heart Star', *African Skies*, 11 [2007], 54-56, with further sources). Where would that leave the familiar Greek myth of Kronos devouring and later disgorging his offspring? From Plato's time onwards, Kronos was the god of the planet Saturn, rich in moons, but the story of his cannibalistic infanticide was centuries older.

Middle Eastern skies are equally conducive to practical astronomy. In ancient Babylonian tradition, the planet Jupiter was represented by Marduk, the chief god. Curiously, a text from the Middle Babylonian period (*An=Anum* II. 257-260) lists this god's four dogs – Ukkumu ('Snatcher'), Sukkulu ('Seizer'), Ikšudu ('He Got It') and Iltebu ('He Howled'). Peter Jensen, an early pan-Babylonist, stuck his neck out by claiming that these dogs could have been Jupiter's main moons (*Die Kosmologie der Babylonier*, p.131). Schott (in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 43 [1936], p.133) compared the conundrum to that of the Greek god Ares and his twin attendants Phobos and Deimos, the two moons of the planet Mars having been discovered as late as 1877. As he pointed out, however, Jensen's conjecture would require that Marduk was already associated with Jupiter at a relatively early time – the 2nd millennium BC.

Considering further that



LETTERS

several non-planetary deities in the Babylonian pantheon had their canine companions as well (*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 8, K, p.71), one can see why contemporary Assyriologists ignore Jensen's bold idea. Then again, no other Babylonian god is known to have had four dogs. Perhaps Jensen's suggestion was not so lunatic after all? Or did the ancients have access to lenses, as Robert Temple argued in *The Crystal Sun* (2000)? We are looking through a glass, darkly.

Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs
Vancouver, Canada

Car out of time

On 20 October 1969, LC (his real initials) and a business associate in insurance whom I shall call Charlie, finished lunch in the small town of Abbeville in south-west Louisiana and began driving north on Highway 167 towards the city of Lafayette about 15 miles (25km) away. It was one of those picture-perfect Fall days – clear blue skies and a nippy 60 degrees, just right for cruising along with the car windows rolled down. I had known LC for 15 years, and what happened next still haunted him decades after it happened.

The highway had been practically traffic-free until they spotted some distance ahead what appeared to be an old turtle-back type car travelling very slowly. It was about 1.30 in the afternoon. While the style was decades old, the car appeared to be in showroom condition. As they got closer, LC noticed a very large bright orange licence plate with the year 1940. This was most unusual and probably illegal, unless provision had been made for the antique car to be used in ceremonial parades.

As they passed the car slowly to its left, LC, who was in the passenger seat, noticed the driver was a young woman dressed in what appeared to be 1940s clothing. In 1969 a young woman wearing a hat complete with a long coloured feather and a fur coat was, to say the least, a bit unusual. A small child stood on



The Beast of Hereford

Who says a photo cannot lie? I was taking pictures out of the window while my neighbour came and went. When I looked at the images later, I was surprised by the horrific form in his garden. I don't think he turned into a sasquatch while my back was turned. Another photo taken a few moments earlier shows he was quite normal and not an oversized malformed monster. The shots were taken with a smartphone, cropped but otherwise unaltered.

Loretta Nikolic Hereford

the seat next to her, possibly a little girl. The gender of the child was hard to determine as it too wore a heavy coat and a cap.

The windows of her car were rolled up, a fact that puzzled LC because, though the temperature was nippy, it was quite pleasant and a light sweater was sufficient to keep you comfortable. As they pulled up next to the car, they were alarmed by the fear and panic in the woman's expression. Driving alongside in a near crawl – no traffic in either direction allowed them to do this – they could see her frantically looking back and forth as if lost or in need of help. She appeared on the verge of tears.

LC called out to her and asked if she needed help. She nodded "yes", all the while looking down (old cars sat a little higher than the low profiles of 1960s cars) with a very puzzled look at their vehicle. LC motioned to her to pull over and park on the side

of the road. He had to repeat the request several times with hand signs and mouthing the words because her window was rolled up and it seemed she had difficulty hearing them. They saw her begin to pull over, so they passed her to pull over in front of her. As they came to a halt on the shoulder of the road, they turned to look at the old car behind them – but there was no sign of it. This was an open highway with no side turnings, no place to hide a car.

Meanwhile, the driver of a vehicle that had been behind the old car pulled over behind them. He ran to LC and Charlie and frantically demanded an explanation as to what had become of the car ahead of him. He said he had seen, some distance away, a new car passing a very old car at a slow pace, so slowly that they appeared to be nearly stationary. He saw the new car pull onto the shoulder and the old car start to do the same. Momentarily, it

obstructed the view of the new car – and then suddenly disappeared.

The three men walked the area for an hour. The third man, who was from out of state, wanted to report the incident to the police. He felt it was a "missing person" situation and they had been witnesses. LC and Charlie refused to do so as they had no idea where the car and its occupants had gone. They were certainly missing, but no police on this plane of existence had the power to find them. The third man finally decided that without their cooperation he could not report this for fear his sanity would be questioned. They exchanged addresses and phone numbers, and for years the third man kept in touch with LC and Charlie, calling to talk about the incident and to confirm that he had seen what he had.

Ken Meaux
Kaplan, Louisiana



Concorde

When I was a young teenager in the late 1950s / early 1960s I had a keen interest in making Airfix and Revell model aeroplanes, especially those of WWII, so even now the sound of a propeller-driven aircraft draws my attention. Sometime in the late 1990s, hearing such an aircraft approaching, I looked up and saw a type of plane I had never seen before. It was a small to medium size (two-seater – or four at the most) low-wing monoplane. There were nacelles on each wing that went back to make a compound tail unit (like that on the P38 Lockheed Lightning of WWII). The engine, along with a ‘pusher’ propeller was mounted behind the cockpit. What was really unusual was the nose of the aircraft, which was fitted with what was obviously a replica of the famous ‘droop snoot’ of the Concorde [see **FT391:74**]. I can only assume that this aircraft had been modified in this way, presumably as a flying test rig to evaluate how deploying the lowering and raising of the nose cone might affect stability.

Interestingly, when I mentioned seeing this aircraft to a friend he told me that his father, a lorry driver at the time, had told of seeing Concorde flying several months before its first official test flight. (Sadly, both are now dead so I can’t check with them, but as I remember he said it was flying somewhere along the Thames Valley around near Marlow – a long way from Bristol where it was developed). However, if the plane I saw was indeed a flying test rig for the revolutionary nose cone, it is just possible that one would also have been fitted to a larger jet aircraft such as a Vulcan bomber, which could easily be mistaken for a Concorde with its distinctive ‘droop snoot’ [although ‘Len Chester’ disagrees – see **FT382:39, 395:73** – Ed.].

Dean Smith
Chesham, Buckinghamshire

Canberra capability

Regarding the ongoing correspondence about the aircraft type in the 1953 reported UFO

encounter of Cyril Townsend Withers [**FT388:31**], particularly the letter from Bert Gray-Malkin [**FT393:71**]: The speeds given are entirely consistent with a Canberra aircraft’s performance. The speed of 225 knots is a “red herring” if considered an absolute speed. In reality this would be an Indicated Airspeed on the aircraft’s Airspeed Indicator and at altitude this differs considerably from True Airspeed. In fact, at 63,000ft/19,200m (the altitude reported) an Indicated Airspeed of 225 knots equates to a True Airspeed of around 500 knots – just within the capabilities of a Canberra, especially one that had not had a full interior fitted.

I don’t believe that any other aircraft fits the description better, certainly not an Avro Shackleton, which would have required at least another two crew members to operate and would never have been capable of reaching altitudes much above 20,000ft (6,000m), even in an experimental form. As far as I can ascertain, no Canberra ever had a gun turret, but the navigator’s position was located behind the pilot and it’s not impossible that a trials aircraft might have had an astrodome fitted to enable a view to the rear. I suspect that Mr Withers’s description relates to this. On balance, I believe that the aircraft almost certainly was a Canberra – which certainly operated from Boscombe Down at that time.

Steve Sinton
Faygate, West Sussex

Not magnetic

I read with interest that Will Read was able to fish out almost 60 cubes from a river in Coventry, using a powerful magnet [**FT394:27**]. I was amazed to read that the cubes were identified as ‘engraved lead’ cubes, as lead is non-magnetic; so how did the magnet pull them from the river?

Dave Poulten
Greenford, Middlesex

Editor’s note: Will Read is quoted as saying: “We were out magnet fishing... at first we found keys and pennies and other bits and

bobs and then we looked down and saw what we thought were tiles.” [Emphasis added]. These were the mystery cubes. *express.co.uk, 14 May 2020.*

Lightning and witch bottles

To those of us who watched *Children of the Stones* many years ago, how satisfying that some stone circles were assembled where lightning struck [**FT390:16**]. The motivation of ancient cultures can only be guessed at, so here’s a speculation: the stones were put there as an attempt to control and channel lightning, the most powerful destructive force known in this part of the world. Fire from the skies, lightning and meteorites have left worldwide legends, among them Prometheus bringing fire to humans, the fallen angel Lucifer and some Chinese dragons. In England we built churches on high hills named after Saints Michael (Glastonbury; subduer of the dragon) and Catherine (Abbotsbury; controller of fire). It seems likely that long before Christianity people were invoking other supernatural beings to subdue and control lightning in these places.

I believe the role of the “witch bottle” may be similar; the fact that the bottles have often been found in chimneys and contain iron shows they were intended as a prophylactic against fire, which was the prime danger in houses where the heating and cooking was by fire, the lighting by rushlight or candle, and the roof and walls might be made of thatch and daub. The inclusion of “personal” ingredients such as urine and fingernails indicates a desire to show possession of the house, rather than some form of curse, as does the immuring of worn shoes. Most of our ancestors did not own their houses, so there was always the possibility of being moved on. And the cats? Perhaps they were there to deter jackdaws from dropping branches down the chimney, blocking it and causing a chimney fire.

Georgina Skipper
Weymouth, Dorset

Rizzio’s murder

As a close student of Holyrood Palace and its worthies in olden times, I was interested to find mention of the murder of David Rizzio in Alan Murdie’s Ghost-watch column [**FT394:19-20**]. The ‘auld wives tale’ that Rizzio was the lover of Mary Queen of Scots has little to recommend it to modern scholars, in view of the vastly different social backgrounds of the pair; Rizzio had begun his career as a common servant. On 9 March 1566, the conspirators confronted Rizzio in Queen Mary’s supper room, where the craven Italian took cover behind the Queen. All of a sudden, the desperadoes rushed forward, holding Mary at gunpoint and waving daggers in her face; they seized hold of Rizzio and wrenched his fingers away from Mary’s skirts, before dragging him through the Queen’s bedroom into the ante-room, where they finished him off with 54 stab wounds. It was in this room the Holyrood tourist guides used to show visitors a bloodstain on the floorboards that they claimed could never be washed out. Holyrood Palace has the distinction of being Britain’s oldest murder house, although the room depicted on p20, Queen Mary’s supper room, is not where the murder took place.

Jan Bondeson
Dunbar, East Lothian

Vallée and Hynek

In his review of *The Hynek UFO Report* [**FT394:64**] Eric Hoffman writes: “A Hynek-inspired character also appears in the Spielberg film [*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*]”. It was Jacques Vallée, rather than Hynek, who served as the model for fellow Frenchman François Truffaut’s character Claude Lacombe. Hynek does, however, appear in the film as himself. He was hired as a scientific consultant on the project and makes a cameo appearance towards the end as one of the people watching the abductees emerging from the alien mothership.

E Bailey
Aunsby, Lincolnshire

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Giant eagles

In 2013 or 2014 I was driving to my friend's house in what is now the city of Eastvale in California. On Belgrave Street, west of Hammer Avenue, I saw what appeared to be three people wearing dark coats and hoodies standing in the middle of the street staring down at a dead rabbit. They were exactly in the middle of both lanes on the divider line. It was a bright sunny day, around 1pm. As I drove closer, I yelled at them to get off the street and honked my horn. One – wearing what appeared to be a trench coat with ruffled feathers at the shoulder – turned and stared at me. I pulled over and sat there a few seconds, not believing my eyes. I got out and realised they were the biggest eagles I've ever seen. My phone didn't have a camera, but a woman pulled over and filmed them on her phone. "Oh my God," she said, "no one is ever going to believe us." She was right. I wish I knew how to contact her, as her film would be proof of our sighting.

Two of the birds were hopping around the street and one partially extended its massive wings, flapped two or three times and flew up onto a light pole. I walked up to the pole and stared in amazement. It turned its head and checked me out, and I noticed how muscular it was, with massive legs and claws 2-3in (5-7.6cm) long. Its beak and eyes were a bright yellow, not dark like those of a golden eagle. The feathers were dark brown or black, ruffled around the neck. They seemed to have a green sheen, like cormorant feathers. I'm 5ft 11in (180cm) tall and I reckon it was 5ft 6in (168cm). The other two were around 5ft (152cm) tall, standing slightly hunched over. As I backed away, the big one flew a few light poles down, and the pole bobbed up and down from its weight. I got back in my car and sat for a few minutes observing them from a distance before driving on to my destination.



I told my friend about it and he said he had seen something like that in much the same location when he first moved there, though his kids made fun of his story and said he was crazy. While driving his quad bike one evening, he saw what he thought was a dwarf palm tree. When he got close, the dark shape came to life and flew over him, looking like a demon. It scared him so badly he turned around, almost popped a tyre jumping over a curb, and went home full throttle, his heart racing. He thought he was having a heart attack. He didn't know what he had seen, but it was the size of a human with wings.

Yanico Tejada
Riverside, California

For other giant bird sightings in the US, see **FT165:21** (June 2002, northeast Pennsylvania); **FT166:6** (Oct 2002, southwestern Alaska); **FT262:46** (2004, near Stillwater, Minnesota – & 2005, western Alaska).

Crawley Wood sprite

I've just read Paul Devereux's Forum story about the strange green figure he saw while researching spirit paths in Ireland [**FT393:55**], and it reminded me of something I saw about 12 years ago in Crackley Wood, a small piece of very ancient woodland just outside Kenilworth (sadly, it's soon to be trashed by the works for HS2).

I was walking my dog on a cold, bright and slightly breezy day in early January. Suddenly,

just a few yards in front of me, a very large, very loose ball of light brown, dead leaves blew from among the trees on my right, across my path towards the trees on my left. It was moving much faster than I'd expect if it were being blown by the breeze. In the middle of the ball of leaves was a little man, dressed from head to foot in the same light brown shade as the leaves. He was about 18in [46cm] tall and running. As he (and the leaves) reached a tree on the left of the path, they all just vanished, as if they had gone into the tree – but I'm not sure that's what happened. One moment they were there, moving very rapidly, then they were gone. Unlike Paul Devereux, I was alone; so I have no one to corroborate my story, but I know what I saw. I also know it sounds mad, and this opinion has been confirmed by the reactions of the very few people I have told.

Chris (name on file)
Coventry

Ghostly neighbour

I wonder if any of your readers have had a similar experience to me where a ghost has been opportunistic and seemingly deliberately targeted them.

In the late 1970s when I was about eight or nine, I regularly spent my evenings skipping in our small back garden in inner city Birmingham. This particular Saturday night was no exception and I was happily skipping away in the fading light when a white cloud floated through the fence

from the garden that ran along the end of ours. As the cloud got closer, it began to take the unmistakable shape of the old woman who had lived there, but had recently died – she was short, rather round, always wore an ankle-length dress with a belt with her hair in a tight bun. As the spectre continued to advance towards me, I naturally took fright, dropped the rope and ran back to the house. I tried the door, but it was locked, and, despite several of my family members being in the living room, it seemed no one heard my bangs on the door and window.

I turned round, expecting to see the figure bearing down on me, but, instead, I saw an empty garden. Thinking I must have imagined it, I shrugged it off and went back up the garden to continue skipping. It didn't take long for the cloud to drift through the fence again and form into the familiar figure, soundlessly gliding along towards me at an even pace. Once again, I dropped the rope and ran back to the house. The same scenario ensued: I banged on the door and window, no one responded, I turned round and the figure had disappeared.

Feeling brave, I ventured back to my previous position and resumed skipping. This time, when the cloud floated through again, I didn't hang around. I legged it back to the house and shouted and banged until my dad opened the door. He pulled a sceptical face when I tried to breathlessly explain what had happened and pacified me with a typical 70s chocolate treat such as a Wagon Wheel or Penguin.

We had never lived harmoniously with the old lady, as she regularly shouted at us and tried to catch us whenever we jumped over the fence to retrieve our ball, but she was never quick enough to get within touching distance. I can't help but wonder if she was destined to repeat this futile action in death as in life.

Catherine Turner
Lichfield, Staffordshire

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PECULIAR POSTCARDS



JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past takes us on tour of East Lothian in the company of postcard artist Reginald Phillimore

8. CURIOSITIES OF EAST LoTHIAN

In Edwardian times, the North Berwick man Reginald Phillimore was one of Britain's postcard kingpins: his cards were bought and collected all over the country and enjoyed healthy sales due to their superior quality. He employed a local schoolgirl to do the delicate colouring; since she liked some variation, no two hand-coloured cards are the same. In this article, Phillimore's East Lothian cards take us on a tour of the county's ghosts and curiosities.

A GIANT AND A GHOST AT LUFFNESS HOUSE

Luffness House near Aberlady is a castle of 13th-century origins, probably designed to control landings in Aberlady Bay. It was long in the family of the Earls of Dunbar and March. In 1739, the reconstructed castle was sold to the Earl of Hopetoun, and it is still held by the Hope family. A large and imposing building, it is not open to the public, although it can be seen from the road. Two Viking skeletons were found below the vaulted basement of Luffness House, one of them a giant 7ft (2.1m) tall. In the ruined chapel is the stone effigy of Sir David de Lindsay, Baron of Luffness; the chapel is supposed to be haunted by spectral footsteps.

THE HAUNTING OF ST MARY'S CHURCH

St Mary's Church, Haddington, was completed in 1486, standing near the Tyne on the site of an earlier church. During the English occupation of Haddington in 1548, the church was badly destroyed. The townspeople rebuilt the nave and used it for worship,



whereas the remainder was left in poor condition for centuries to come. When Phillimore came to call in Edwardian times, most of the church was still in ruins. This would change in the early 1970s, however: after a major restoration project, St Mary's was completely rebuilt and it is today a perfectly good parish church, said to be the longest in Scotland. It is also said to be haunted by the ghost of John 1st Earl of Lauderdale, a persecutor of the Covenanters who is buried in the Chapel of the Three Kings. He has been heard to walk around in the church, and each time the Lauderdale vault is opened, his coffin is found in a different position.

THE SPECTRAL HORSE OF DIRLETON

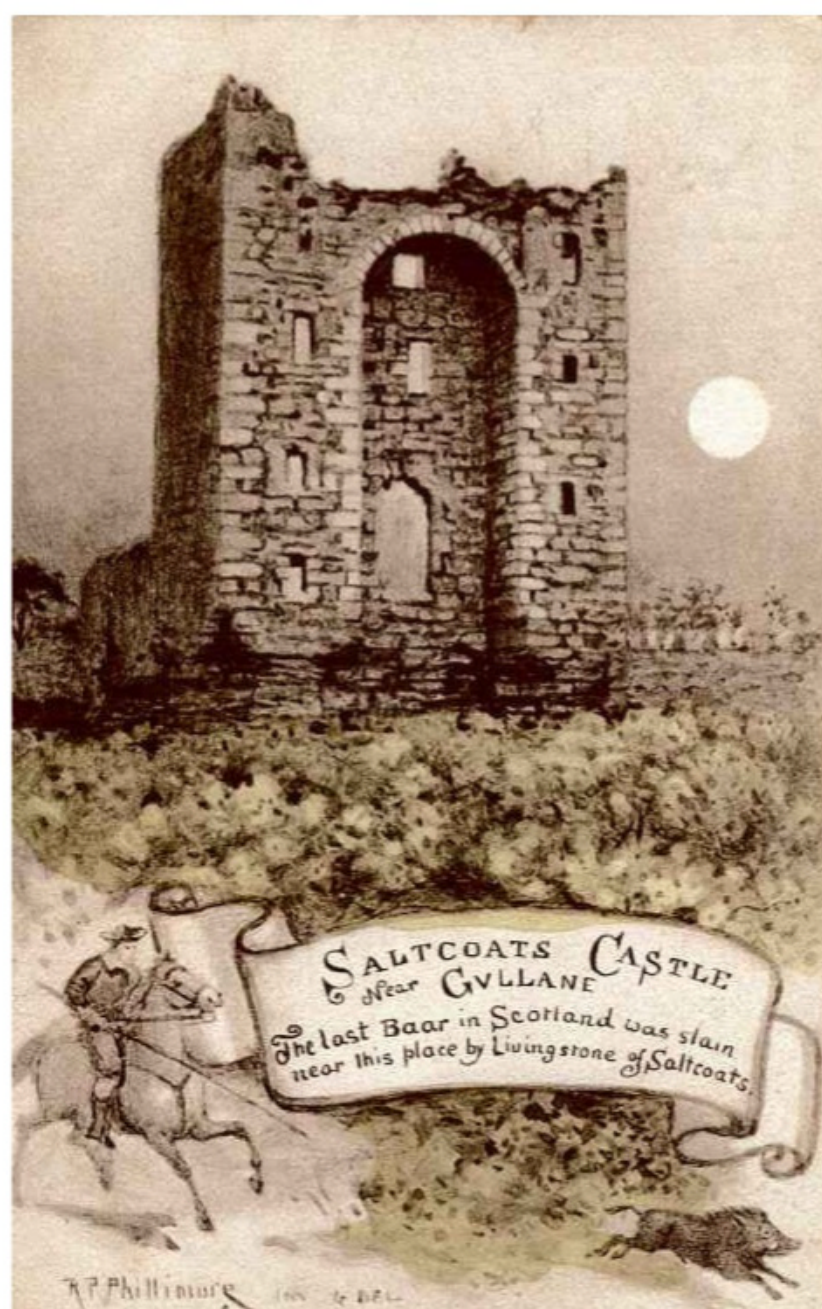
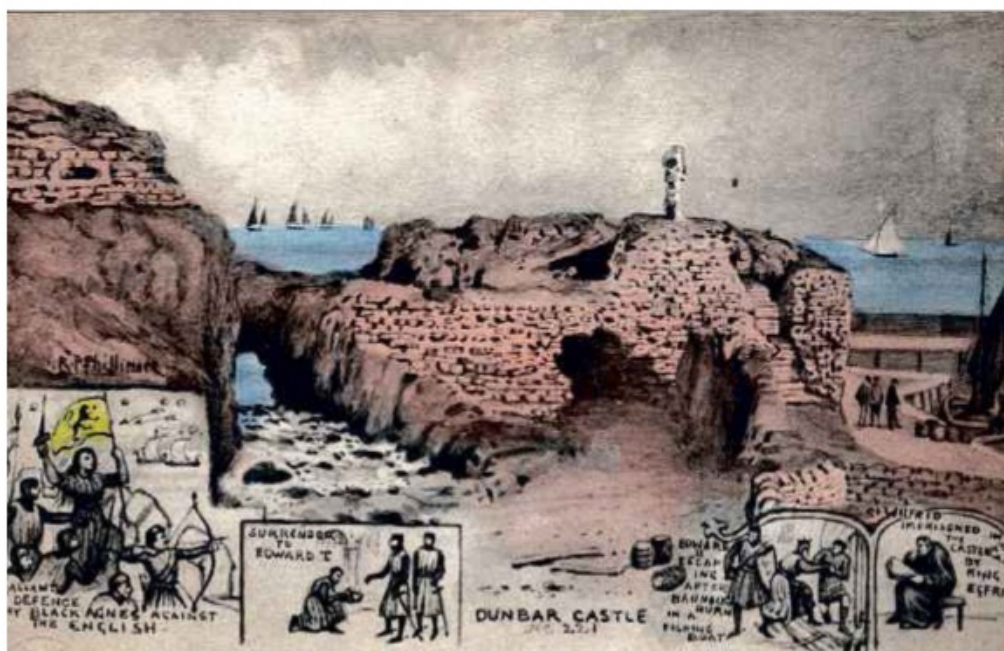
The village of Dirleton (for postcard, see contents page) is remarkably intact today and has not changed much



since Phillimore's times: he would have recognised many of the buildings, although the main road through the village has been widened and the omnipresent motor cars have infested even this East Lothian idyll. Ancient Beadle's Cottage has the reputation of being haunted by a spectral horse, which kicks at the stable door.

THE LAST WILD BOAR IN SCOTLAND

There is consensus that the wild boar was wiped out in Scotland in the 17th century, but divergent opinions as to where the last specimen was killed. Phillimore had heard the version that it was hunted down by Livingstone of Saltcoates not far from his castle, and he depicts the last wild boar running for its life, with a spear-wielding huntsman in hot pursuit. Another version of this legend, dating back to 1845, merely says that Livingstone was awarded some land for killing a particularly ferocious wild boar near Saltcoates. A conflicting legend states that the last wild boar in Scotland was killed at Prora, East Lothian, where there is a 'boar stone' to commemorate this event; what remains of this stone is at Prora Farmhouse today. Other versions say that the last wild



FACING PAGE ABOVE: St Mary's Church, Haddington. FACING PAGE BELOW: Luffness House. TOP LEFT: Dunbar Castle. ABOVE LEFT: Spott village. ABOVE RIGHT: The last wild boar running for its life at Saltcoates. BELOW: The Whittinghame Tower.

boar was killed at Swinton, Borders, or at Torinturk, Argyll and Bute.

DUNBAR CASTLE

There has been a castle overlooking Dunbar Harbour since early mediæval times, besieged, repaired and extended on several occasions. Its finest hour came in 1338, when 'Black Agnes', the Countess of Dunbar, and a small troop of soldiers successfully withstood a siege from superior English forces. In 1566, after the murder of Rizzio, the Earls of Bothwell and Huntly rescued Mary and Darnley from Holyrood, and took them to Dunbar Castle, where they recruited soldiers and gathered supplies before entering Edinburgh in triumph. But Mary was dethroned and Bothwell exiled; on orders from the Scottish Parliament, Dunbar Castle was besieged and Bothwell's remaining henchmen captured, before the

castle was razed to the ground. Phillimore's postcard shows the very ruinous state of this once-proud castle, the remains of which are today home to a quantity of seabirds. The ruins are said to be haunted by a phantom piper. The Creel Restaurant, a former smuggling inn situated not far away, is haunted by spectral footsteps and ghostly voices.

SPOTT'S GREY LADY

The small village of Spott, two miles south-west of Dunbar, is quite ancient and was a centre during the Roman occupation of southern Scotland. In 1570, the Parson of Spott, John Kelloe, murdered his wife and hanged her in the manse, before going to church and delivering "a more than usually eloquent sermon". He was executed in Edinburgh for his crime. The church is an old and venerable building, but has been restored over the centuries; the old manse that was home to John



Kelloe has been pulled down and a new one constructed. The house depicted by Phillimore, the village hall with its characteristic steeple, still stands and seems in a good state of repairs. Stately Spott House, also still standing, although the estate has been broken up, has a Grey Lady legend.

THE NINE DEMONS OF WHITTINGHAME

The Whittinghame Tower, a 15th-century tower house in a rural setting, is said to have been the site where the Earl of Bothwell conspired with the tower's owner, Archibald Douglas, to murder Lord Darnley, although some historians claim the plot was hatched at Craigmillar Castle. The tower has survived war and strife, and although it looked rather ivy-covered and neglected when Phillimore came to call, it is today privately owned and well looked after. An obscure old legend says that a circle of nine standing stones at Whittinghame entomb nine demons, who patiently await revenge on those who imprisoned them.

This is an edited extract from Jan Bondeson's book *Phillimore's East Lothian* (Stenlake Publishing, 2020).

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMix

ODD DEATHS IN ANCIENT GREEK MUSIC
No 1. TERPANDER

HUNT EMERSON

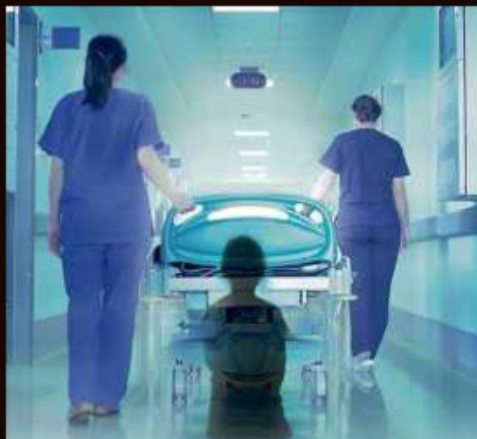
SPARTA - 675 BC
A SINGER-SONGWRITER CALLED TERPANDER WAS RENOWNED AS THE FATHER OF GREEK MUSIC!



ONE DAY HE WAS DOING A GIG, SINGING AND PLAYING HIS SIMPLE MELODIES!
HIS FANS WERE THROWING FLOWERS AT HIM...



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STATUES THAT WALK,
MUSIC OF THE SPHERES
AND MUCH MORE...**

FORTEAN TIMES 398

ON SALE 8 OCT 2020

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Teenager Damian Szarach was found dead in his room at a children's home in Hayling Island, Hampshire, after taking a lethal dose of caffeine. He had purchased 1kg (2.2lb) of powdered caffeine online, which he had sent to a friend's home, telling him it was a protein supplement. He was found with nearly four times the lethal dose of caffeine in his blood and white powder on his face and body. An inquest heard that the 17-year-old had planned his own death; in a suicide note, he explained he had decided to take his own life because a 2013 sexual harm prevention order prevented him from pursuing his dream of joining the police. The inquest came two weeks after a hearing into the death of biomedical science student Sophia Benning, 24, who had also killed herself by overdosing on caffeine. *D.Mail, D.Star, 9 Aug 2019.*

A 36-year-old Peterborough man, Lukasz Sandelewski, died from caffeine poisoning after consuming energy drinks and taking caffeine tablets and flu medicines that contained the stimulant. Toxicology reports found a blood caffeine concentration of 282 micrograms per 1ml. The normal fatal level of caffeine in the blood is around 80 micrograms per 1ml, so Mr Sandelewski was 3.5 times above the fatal limit. The pathologist remarked that caffeine toxicity as a cause of death was "very unusual in a young person." *cambridge-news.co.uk, 11 Apr; Sun, 12 Apr 2020.*

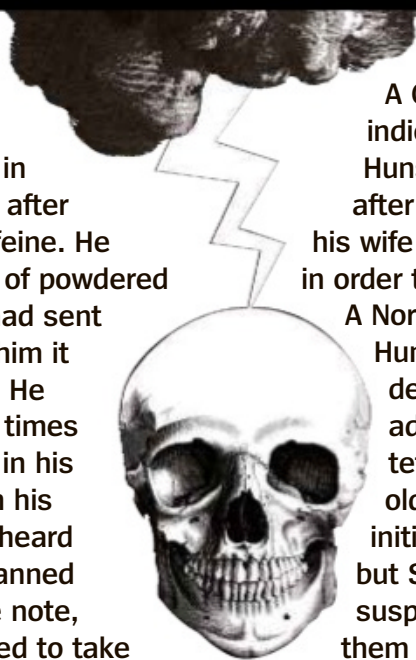
A 56-year-old Australian man was killed by a mackerel on 14 August after the fish leapt from the sea into a fishing boat and struck him on the chest. He was fishing with family and friends in Darwin Harbour in the Northern Territory, and was rushed to nearby Cullen Bay jetty, where paramedics were waiting. They attempted to revive him but were unable to save his life. A local fisherman told ABC he had heard the mackerel weighed 18kg (40lb), and "speared right into this guy and caused major blunt trauma." *D.Telegraph, 16 Aug 2020.*

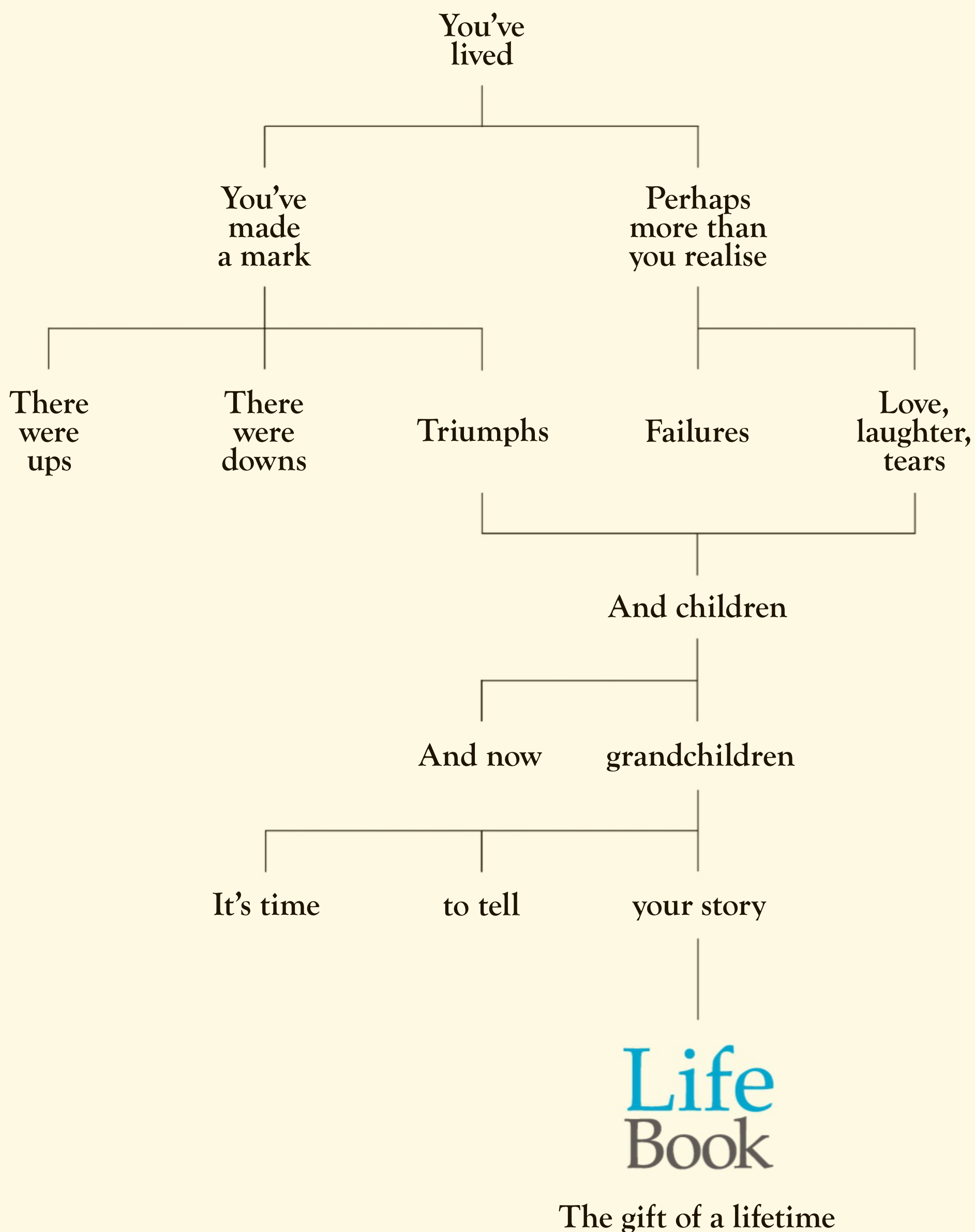
A South Carolina man and his nine-year-old daughter were mistaken for deer during a New Year's Day hunting trip and killed by a hunter. Kim Drawdy, 30, and daughter Lauren were shot in Colleton County as four hunters tried to move deer. *<i>3 Jan 2020.*

A Gaston County grand jury indicted paramedic Joshua Lee Hunsucker on three felonies after he was accused of killing his wife using poisonous eye drops in order to collect her life insurance.

A North Carolina court heard that Hunsucker, 35, charged with first degree murder, had allegedly administered a lethal dose of tetrahydrozoline to his 32-year-old wife Stacy. Her death was initially ruled a heart attack, but Stacy's mother made her suspicions known to police, telling them to investigate a \$250,000 (£193,000) insurance pay-out, and whether Hunsucker had been having an affair. The couple had been high school sweethearts and had two young children. Colleagues said they had been shocked by Hunsucker's "unaffected" demeanour and by his taking a new girlfriend within six months of his wife's death. Hunsucker had refused consent for an autopsy on his wife's body, but an earlier blood sample (she was an organ donor) showed levels of tetrahydrozoline 30 to 40 times the therapeutic dose. This would have been especially dangerous to her heart, since she had had a pacemaker fitted three years before. The trial continues. *D.Mail, 24 Dec 2019; newsbreak, 29 May 2020.*

Survivalism in France is under scrutiny following the death of a 26-year-old man, who ate a plant his instructor allegedly said was a harmless "wild carrot". It was in fact hemlock water dropwort, perhaps the most poisonous plant in France. John Malardé, 48, a former member of 3rd Marine Infantry Regiment, has been charged with manslaughter, involuntary injury, forgery and illegal possession of weapons after the man fell into a coma and died from cardiac arrest. The victim, known only as Ulysse, was part of a group of 12 would-be survivalists on a 72-hour course in Brittany, run by Malardé, who said Ulysse had eaten the plant without his permission, cooked it and given it to the others, eight of whom had to be taken to hospital. "When you don't know, you don't touch," Malardé told *Ouest France* newspaper. "Ulysse made the mistake of consuming this plant when I hadn't authorised him to." However, another course member said: "Malardé identified this plant as the edible wild carrot. We cooked it in front of him. We were all very ill, had eyesight problems, paralysis, loss of consciousness." *D.Telegraph, 18 Aug 2020.*





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